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Village of Lancaster

# Historic Preservation Commission

## Mural Guidelines

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Adopted 10/11/2023 ◻ [www.villageoflancasterhpc.com](http://www.villageoflancasterhpc.com)

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### **Purpose**

The Village of Lancaster Board of Trustees directed the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to draft guidelines for the installation of murals on locally designated historic properties or within historic districts in the Village. Mural requests in the Village have been made by individuals and groups as the popularity of outdoor murals, and the availability of funding mechanisms has increased in recent years. The Historic Preservation Commission felt that such requests for murals on locally designated properties required discussion and a set of guidelines by which to make informed decisions about granting Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs). The guidelines prepared below are the result of combing through mural guidelines for historic properties in numerous communities throughout the country.

Per §184-14, the HPC is responsible for the approval or disapproval of proposals for exterior changes to a historic property. The installation of murals constitutes an exterior change and therefore an approved COA is required for locally designated historic properties or within historic districts in the Village.

For the purposes of these guidelines, a “mural” shall be defined as an artistic work applied to an exterior surface of a pre-existing structure and that does not constitute a sign under §350-35 Sign Regulations Code within the Village of Lancaster, NY Code. As a best practice, murals should not include commercial product names, service names, business names, symbolic logos, and other such information that can be perceived as an endorsement or advertisement.

### **Application Requirements**

Applicants seeking a COA for a mural within the historic district shall submit:

- Completed COA Application Form
  - \$25 cash or check made payable to “Village of Lancaster.”
  - Color photographs of existing conditions (digital preferred)
    - Photos from any/all public right-of-ways (streets, sidewalks, trails, etc.)
    - Specific photos of elements to be modified.
  - Historic photographs/images (if any)
  - To-scale color drawings/renderings of the proposed mural and proposed location of the mural on the structure
  - Specifics on any proposed illumination (if any).
  - Specific materials to be used.
  - Written approval from the property owner for the mural, provided the applicant is not the property owner.
  - An agreement between the artist and property owner identifying responsibilities.
  - A maintenance plan specifying care and the parties responsible for the maintenance of the mural. Maintenance includes, but is not limited to, graffiti removal, removal of surface dirt, reapplication of coatings, touching up damaged areas, and ensuring vegetation does not harm the mural or supporting building.
  - An agreement between the artist and the property owner identifying who is responsible for the removal of the mural.
  - Photo documentation of the completed mural shall be supplied to the HPC to provide a base line for future maintenance, conservation, and restoration.
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### **Mural Location**

- A. Locate murals only on masonry buildings that have previously been painted. Painting contributing masonry buildings that were not historically painted is not appropriate and does not meet the “Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.”
- B. Use smooth wall planes. Locating a mural on a building with siding features such as bevel, lap or board and batten detailing or split-faced stone is not appropriate.
- C. Locate murals on side, rear, or alley elevations only. Murals on the primary street façade of a building are not appropriate. However, temporary storefront window murals may be appropriate. Murals on secondary street facades of corner buildings should be carefully considered for visual impact on wraparound storefront elements, where present.
- D. A mural is most appropriate for non-contributing buildings. However, potential impacts to the overall district must still be considered.
- E. Murals shall be confined to one wall of a building and not wrap around to other sides, nor may any building have more than one mural.
- F. No mural shall be permitted on a building that has had masonry cleaning or major repointing, nor may a mural be used in lieu of cleaning or repointing on a building in need of it.
- G. Except as provided below, murals shall not cover windows, doors, cornices, or other architectural elements.
  - a. Murals may be permitted on windows and doors temporarily boarded due to vandalism. They shall be permitted for no more than 90 days of the time permitted for repairs by the Code Enforcement Official.
  - b. No mural shall be permitted on preventative boarding.

### **Mural Design, Scale and Compatibility**

- A. Design a mural so that it does not obscure, detract from, or cause damage to character-defining features, such as historic masonry. Murals should not alter historic streetscapes or impair one’s ability to interpret the historic character of the building or the overall area.
  - B. Carefully scale a mural to the property on which it is located so that its proportions and size are compatible with the building and the district. A mural should complement, not compete with, or overwhelm the architecture or character-defining features of a building.
  - C. A mural is most appropriate for blank walls or areas of a wall where there is no fenestration (window or door openings) so that it does not distract from the visual integrity and spatial organization of the building.
  - D. Accent lighting compatible with the scale, style, materials, and context of the building may be appropriate so long as any lighting is shaded, shielded, or directed to minimize glare and impacts to neighboring properties.
  - E. Consider the visibility and prominence of a mural from adjacent locations within the historic district. A mural should be sensitive to the overall context.
  - F. No mural shall exceed 50% of the wall on which it is placed or twice the maximum size allowed by the Village of Lancaster, NY Code for wall signage in the area, whichever is smaller.
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### **Mural Materials**

- A. A mural shall utilize treatments and materials that promote the district as an area of high-quality design. For example, properly prepare surfaces and use appropriate masonry primers and exterior grade paints to ensure proper adhesion. Power washing or blasting to prepare surfaces is not appropriate and murals should not be used in lieu of repointing a deteriorating wall.
- B. Luminescent, neon, and reflective paints and finishes are not appropriate and can pose a safety hazard.
- C. Avoid affixing dimensional and imitative materials such as artificial stone, sidings and metals.
- D. Murals are encouraged on removeable materials such as canvas or a wood frame as an alternative to directly painting on a building. Anchor the framing with a small gap between the building so that water can weep between the mural surface and the wall. Anchor the framing through mortar joints (not masonry façade).
- E. Painting and installation materials that are used should always be reversible, and the building surface should not be harshly cleaned, stripped or compromise the masonry of the building. If possible, the mural could be installed on a temporary film and applied. This means the film could be easily removed and discussion about this process should occur between the HPC and the applicant together.

### **Removal**

- A. A COA shall be required for the removal of a mural.
- B. Upon removal, any materials used to adhere the mural shall be removed at the time the mural is removed. This includes, but is not limited to brackets, mounting hardware, caulk or grout, and adhesive glues. The surface shall be returned to its original condition.

### **Additional Notes**

- Murals were historically used on the sides of buildings to advertise a business, product, or service. These remain as faded remnants (“ghost signs”) and contribute to the history of an area. Obscuring, altering, or removing exposed historic murals is not appropriate. Likewise, extensive touchups or overpainting such murals to make them look new creates a false sense of history and is generally not appropriate.
  - Each mural should be treated as a case-by-case approval and not part of a larger, mass approval. Each mural should be significant individually and not become a “petting zoo” type of environment for murals.
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