

CITY OF RICHMOND
COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
COMMISSION MEMBER JOB DESCRIPTION

BACKGROUND

The City of Richmond Commission of Architectural Review (CAR) is one of the oldest preservation commissions in the Commonwealth of Virginia, founded in 1957. CAR is charged by Richmond's City Council with preserving and enhancing the architectural and historic resources in the capital city. The Commission is a volunteer organization with citizen-at-large members as well as representatives of major professional and preservation groups. There are nine (9) CAR members who are appointed by a vote of City Council. Appointment terms are five (5) years or until replaced; however, a Commission member may be appointed to a shorter term, if filling an unexpired appointment due to resignation. Each CAR member is limited to two (2), five (5) year terms. It is critical that CAR be sufficiently equipped to fulfill the statutory roles and educational functions in order to provide leadership for historic preservation in a responsible and sensitive manner.

MISSION

The mission of the Commission of Architectural Review is:

- To assist City Council in administering designated Old and Historic Districts.
- To review applications for modifications, new construction and demolition in designated Old and Historic Districts.
- To preserve, protect, and encourage appropriate rehabilitation of Richmond's recognized historic, architectural and cultural landmarks, structures, and buildings.
- To provide architectural expertise to City Council and City Administration concerning Richmond's historic assets.

EXPECTATIONS OF COMMISSION MEMBERS

1. **Regular Monthly Public Meeting:** Attendance at regularly scheduled monthly public meetings for Application Review and decisions is critical to the Commission's ability to satisfactorily complete the most important responsibility delegated by City Council. A quorum is required for Commission votes and the property owners within designated Old and Historic Districts deserve the attention and expertise of all Commission members because applications relate to the property owner's ability to use their property. The monthly meeting schedule is published by the CAR staff during the last months of the preceding year, and each CAR member should make these meetings a very high priority commitment on their business and personal calendars.

Time Commitment: Regular monthly meetings normally range from 3 to 5 hours, and Commission members are expected to attend the entire meeting.

2. **Site Visitation:** Following receipt of the CAR staff notification of Applications to be considered at the regularly scheduled monthly public meeting, each CAR member is expected to physically visit the property site to become familiar with those aspects of the subject property that are visible from any public right-of-way, as well as the surrounding environment of the subject property. First hand, visual knowledge of the subject properties is a major component to ensuring that Commission property rights decisions are legally defensible as well as contributing to the credibility and good will of Commission decisions. Site visitation may be done individually and/or with other Commission members. If enough Commission members request, CAR staff can schedule a city van to provide for a group tour of application sites, or you may wish to pair with one other Commission member to visit application sites. This may be the most inconvenient and time-consuming part of preparing for CAR meetings. However, this is important to your decision-making ability.

Time Commitment: Varies depending upon number of applications, location of properties, complexity of Application and the particular interest of each CAR member. For example, if the property in question is located in your neighborhood, you may spend more time assessing options and hearing the thoughts of surrounding neighbors.

3. **CITY COUNCIL ADVICE AND EDUCATION:** Each Commission member is responsible for establishing an on-going, consistent educational relationship with **both** the elected City Council member from the district within which they vote, in addition to an assigned City Council member from a different Council district. The goal is to provide Council members with advice and education so as to:
 - increase the preservation benefits/assets knowledge base of each Council member;
 - learn what the two Council members think about how the Commission can improve services to Council and City Administration, in addition to the voters in the designated City Council districts;

- be the consistent, familiar, trusted resource person for assigned Council members and their liaisons on any issues related to historic resources, appeals to Commission decisions, historic communities, and all other related topics;
 - educate Council members regarding the duties and responsibilities of their appointed citizens under the City Zoning Code, including the expertise, time and effort required to fulfill the duties of a Commission member; and
 - become the assigned Council member's "staff" person and trusted adviser for preservation issues.
4. **Committee Assignments:** All Commission members are assigned by Commission consent to appropriate committees to study specific administrative and/or preservation issues, produce "position papers" with background research for consideration and endorsement by the entire Commission, work with designated citizen groups, develop visual displays for presentations, plan and schedule training sessions for Commission members and/or other related assignments as determined by the entire Commission. Committees are limited to two Commission members so that work can be easily scheduled.

Committee work sessions are not considered to be public meetings requiring media notification. Committee work may be completed with other Commission members, CAR staff, other appropriate city staff, and/or appropriate interested citizens. The Vice Chair maintains a record of Committee assignments and agreed-upon target due dates with the goal of ensuring active participation of all Commission members in carrying a fair share of the workload.

Time Commitment: Varies depending upon the assignment and parties involved. Basically, this means that the time committed is "what it takes to get the job done right", resulting in a work product that enhances the work of CAR and satisfies both the mission of CAR and the agreed-upon need of the Commission (members as well as staff).

5. **Special Commission Meetings:** As necessary to complete Commission business and/or accommodate a very special, time sensitive Application, special meetings may be scheduled in addition to the regularly scheduled monthly public meeting. Efforts are made to select a date, time, and location for special meetings that are amenable to the majority of Commission members as well as the applicant and other parties with a direct interest in the Application. Commission members are expected to respond very quickly when dates, times, and locations for special meetings are being considered. Once the special meeting has been scheduled, Commission members are expected to make every reasonable effort possible to attend the special meeting to ensure a quorum for full consideration of the issues that have determined the need for the special meeting. Site visitation and familiarity with the applications and issues to be considered at the special meeting is as important to the Commission as for a regularly scheduled monthly public meeting. While these Special Commission meetings may create a scheduling problem, as a matter of good public practice, the CAR needs to be willing to consider special meetings for applications of some urgency that could not reasonably be avoided by the applicant. Flexibility on this matter will go a long way in assuring the public that CAR is genuinely interested in local preservation concerns as well as their property rights and needs.

Time Commitment: Special Commission meetings normally range from two to four hours, approximately two to six times during a calendar year.

6. **Education/Training:** As a Certified Local Government (CLG), each CAR member is required to attend related professional training each year. Under the National Historic Preservation Act, CLGs are required to establish and maintain a requirement of each CAR member, although the City of Richmond does not provide funding for this requirement. However, CAR staff does have access to free-of-charge training activities and may be able to schedule use of a City vehicle, if sufficient CAR interest exists for specific training events. Maintaining CLG status is important for the City of Richmond for numerous reasons, including the ability to apply for grants and technical assistance from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR).

Time Commitment: Varies depending upon the training opportunity, location, and transportation requirements.

6. **Appeals Representative:** When a citizen determines to appeal a decision of the Commission to the City Council, the City Council CAR Appeals Committee (consisting of two members of City Council) schedules an informal hearing to discuss the details of the Commission's justification for the decision being appealed. Following this informal appeals hearing, the entire City Council considers the CAR Appeal at a regularly scheduled public meeting of City Council. Council uses the guidance of the City Council members assigned to research the CAR Appeals Committee as well as presentations made during the public appeal during the City Council meeting. Two Commission members are assigned to represent the Commission at these informal Appeals Hearings and at the City Council public review and vote on the Appeal. CAR staff prepares the written portion of the CAR presentation with input from Commission members, especially those assigned to represent the Commission at the Appeals Hearings. Commission members are selected due to knowledge of the specific property, historic district, and/or professional expertise concerning the details of the Application and the issues being appealed. Informal Appeals Hearings are scheduled by the City Council members, and Commission members are expected to notify CAR staff IMMEDIATELY if they are unable to attend the scheduled meeting so that other Commission members can be scheduled to represent the Commission. Unfortunately, CAR has very little control over when these Informal Appeals Hearings are scheduled; however, this process is a prime opportunity for CAR members to interact with City Council representatives in a way that supports the educational and consultation portion of CAR's mission.

City Council meetings are scheduled on the first and third Mondays of each month, beginning at 6:00 p.m. in City Council Chambers. CAR Appeals *may* be very late on the Council agenda, thus may not be heard until late in the evening. Commission representatives are expected to attend and be knowledgeable when defending CAR decisions before the Appeals Committee and City Council. Without the support and cooperation of City Council members, CAR's work is difficult at best and could be impossible in some cases.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE COMMISSION CHAIR

1. All seven of the tasks and expectations stated for CAR members.
2. Conduct all CAR meetings where the public is present and/or Applications are being considered using the appropriate parliamentary procedures and CAR Rules of Procedures to ensure an orderly meeting.
3. The Chair may limit the amount of time for public comment on Applications, especially controversial Applications but may not prohibit public comment by all those who have expressed a desire to address their concerns to CAR members.
4. Request all applicants and those wishing to comment to state their name and address for the CAR minutes.
5. Request CAR members to limit their comments and questions to the business of the Applications, items listed on the Agenda, and Commission business issues.
6. Direct other items not directly related to Applications and/or agenda to the appropriate CAR committee for full consideration with a follow-up report to the full Commission at the next appropriate meeting.
7. Inform the public attending the CAR meetings of the procedures which will be followed so that applicants will be prepared and feel more comfortable. Remember that this may be the first, and even one and only, time an applicant comes before CAR with an Application.
8. Start on time by requesting that all CAR members arrive on time or before the stated scheduled meeting time so that a quorum is available to conduct the business before the Commission. Follow up with CAR members if CAR staff reminder calls indicate that there may not be a quorum in attendance.
9. Follow an appropriate process that permits appropriate recognition of applicants, CAR staff, interested citizens and CAR members while ensuring a timely and orderly review of Applications.
10. Review the draft agenda for order, inclusion of appropriate business, familiarity of business items, and timing considerations.
11. Assign CAR members to appropriate committees based on expertise, expressed interests, and equitable distribution of CAR workload.
12. Serve as primary contact for CAR staff.

EXPECTATIONS OF COMMISSION VICE CHAIR

1. All seven of the expectations stated for CAR members.
2. Fulfill duties of Chair as needed and/or requested.
3. Maintain an accurate, up-to-date record of CAR member committee assignments, appeals assignments, due dates, and follow up with CAR members to remind and be prepared to present an accurate report at each CAR meeting.
4. Become Acting Chair until a successor is elected, as directed by Rules of Procedure.

SUMMARY / TIPS

A common misunderstanding is that CAR dictates good taste. In reality, CAR members are charged with the *protection of historic resources*, not the judgment of good taste. Therefore, it is important that all CAR members are well acquainted with the architectural styles that are present in Richmond's Old and Historic Districts and with rehabilitation and new construction design standards.

The following is intended to provide some concrete steps for you as you prepare to serve on the Commission of Architectural Review (CAR).

1. Each CAR member should read and be sure he/she understands the Richmond Historic Preservation Ordinance (Section 3 [Ordinance] of your CAR Manual). Pay particular attention to the Purpose statement (Section 32-930.2) of the Ordinance and the Rules of Procedures (Section 4 of your CAR manual). This defines CAR's authority and decision-making process.
2. Refer to this Ordinance and rehabilitation and new construction standards frequently when considering Applications, especially in complex, difficult cases.
3. Make sure there is no Conflict of Interest for each Application (Section 5 of your CAR manual). If you have a special interest in an Application being considered by CAR, abstain from participation.
4. Maintain a professional attitude toward project applicants. Use the correct procedure, and always be courteous. Remember, your decisions are about properties, not individuals.
5. Try to make applicants feel comfortable as it may be their first, or even one and only, contact with CAR or a governmental review body of any type. CAR members are public servants and have the opportunity to leave applicants and the interested public with the feeling that he/she has been treated equitably by the Commission and the local government process.
6. Regularly attend all Commission meetings as well as training/educational opportunities held for Commission members.
7. Obtain reading materials on design review, historic preservation, urban design, and architectural history. The more informed CAR members are about these related subjects, the more valuable each CAR member will be to the Commission, to City Council and City Administration, neighborhoods and property owners, as well as respected by applicants for being knowledgeable about the authority and responsibilities delegated to you as a CAR member.
8. Be careful not to express personal opinions of what is "pretty" or "in good taste" or "affordable" when determining whether an alteration or proposed design for new construction is appropriate. Make certain that you refer to the Ordinance and to design standards for the basis of your votes. Applicants should know that decisions are not based on Commission members' personal tastes, whims, likes, or dislikes. All Applications should be viewed objectively, regardless of the applicant.

SUMMARY / TIPS (continued)

9. Review each Application on its own merits. Each project should be considered unique in its own environment and architectural style. Each property should be considered a product of its own time and surrounding context. Any changes that have taken place over time may have acquired historic significance of their own.
10. Avoid denying an Application without first offering the applicant specific guidance on how the Application could be improved so that the proposed project will meet the design standards.
11. Do not be satisfied by an applicant's claims that there is only one method to solve a particular design problem, especially if the proposed method is not in accordance with design standards.
12. Do not hesitate to ask the applicant for additional information if you do not fully understand the proposal being requested. A CAR decision based on insufficient documentation will come back to haunt the Commission.
13. Feel free to seek the advice of recognized professionals from state, local, and/or private preservation organizations. These are our allies, as well as eyes and ears in some situations.
14. Each CAR member is responsible for the quality of their decisions. Unless you have read the agenda, studied the Applications, and inspected the site, you are making decisions on the basis of immediate perceptions gained only during the public presentations. Good meeting preparation on your part will help in working out acceptable and understandable solutions with property owners.
15. Respond quickly to CAR staff telephone inquiries, especially concerning attendance at CAR meetings.