

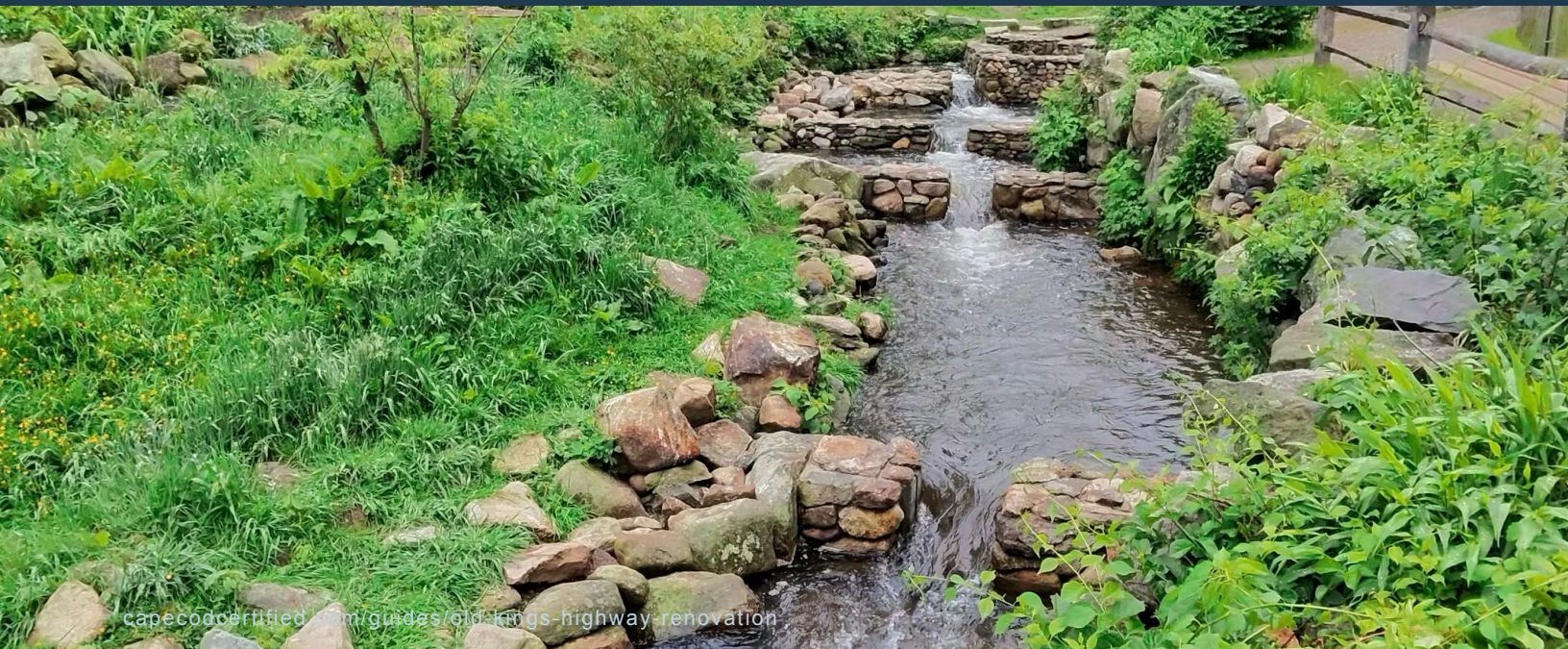


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CAPE COD HOME

Old Kings Highway Historic District: Cape Cod Homeowner's Renovation Guide

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



capecodcertified.com/guides/old-kings-highway-renovation

If you own a home along Route 6A on the north side of the Cape, you own more than a house — you own a piece of one of the largest historic districts in the country, and that comes with rules. The Old King’s Highway Regional Historic District protects the classic look of the Cape’s north shore, and it means many exterior changes to your home need committee approval *before* you touch them. It’s not red tape for its own sake — it’s why 6A still looks like the Cape everyone pictures. Here’s how to renovate within it without headaches. (Rules and processes vary by town committee and change — always confirm with your town’s Historic District Committee before planning work.)

What the Old King’s Highway district is

The **Old King’s Highway Regional Historic District** covers the historic Route 6A corridor across the north side of the Cape — running through **Sandwich, Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Brewster, and Orleans** (the district generally follows the 6A/north-side area of these towns). Established to preserve the area’s historic architectural character, it’s overseen by town-level **Historic District Committees (HDCs)** with real authority over exterior appearances.

What needs approval

The key principle: **exterior changes visible from a public way generally require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Committee** — on top of any building permit. That commonly includes:

Project	Typically needs HDC review?
New structures, additions	Yes
Changing siding, roofing materials, or color	Often yes
New/replacement windows and doors (visible)	Often yes
Fences, sheds, decks (visible)	Often yes
Signs, exterior lighting	Often yes
Solar panels (visible)	Often yes — check
Interior-only work	Usually no
Not visible from a public way	Often no

Because “visible from a public way” is the trigger, even modest exterior changes on a 6A property can require review. When unsure, ask the committee first.

The approval process

1. **Contact your town’s Historic District Committee early** — before you finalize plans.
2. **Submit an application** for a Certificate of Appropriateness with details/drawings of the exterior change.
3. **The committee reviews** (often at a public hearing) whether the design fits the district’s historic character.
4. **Get the certificate** — then pull your building permit and proceed. (You generally need HDC approval *before* the building permit for exterior work.)

How to work with the district, not against it

- **Design in the vernacular.** Traditional Cape materials and forms — shingle siding, appropriate windows, historically-sympathetic details — sail through more easily than modern departures.
- **Bring the committee in early.** A quick pre-application conversation saves redesigns and delays.
- **Budget the timeline.** HDC review adds time (hearings are scheduled); plan your project calendar around it, especially before a busy season.
- **Hire a locally-experienced contractor and designer** who know the district — they'll steer the design and paperwork smoothly.

Common homeowner mistakes

- **Starting exterior work without HDC approval** — this can mean a stop-work order and having to undo or redo work.
- **Assuming “it’s my house.”** In the district, the public-facing exterior is regulated, whatever your personal taste.
- **Underestimating the timeline** — the approval step is real and scheduled.

The upside

Yes, it’s an extra step. But the district is also *why your neighborhood looks the way it does* — and why 6A homes hold their character and appeal. The rules that constrain your project also protect your property’s setting and value.

Don’t miss: calling your town’s Historic District Committee *before* you design exterior changes, not after. Working with the committee early — designing in the district’s traditional Cape vernacular and getting your Certificate of Appropriateness before the building permit — turns a potential headache into a smooth process, and keeps you on the right side of the rules that make the Old King’s Highway one of the most beautiful stretches on the Cape.

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