

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT HISTORIC DISTRICTS

WHAT IS A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT?

A local historic district is a historically significant area that is protected by a historic district ordinance. The local unit of government appoints a historic district commission to review proposed work to the exterior of resources in the district to determine if the work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation. Designating an area as a local historic district is one of the few ways a community can preserve the historic character of a neighborhood and provide protection for its historic resources. Creating a historic district is the only means a municipality in Michigan has to prevent the demolition of historic buildings. [CLICK HERE](#) to learn more.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING IN A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT?

- Historically significant buildings in the community are identified and protected.
- Property owner's investments are protected from incompatible design or demolitions in the district by having architectural review of changes in the district.
- Contributing resources qualify to owner to apply for the state historic rehabilitation tax credit.

WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF BEING IN A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT?

- Adds a review step to the building permit process – exterior work only.
- Owners may not be able to build exactly what they want if what they are proposing does not meet The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (exterior only).
- Acceptable design alternatives or materials may be more expensive than alternatives that do not meet The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (exterior only).

It can be noted that usually higher cost materials have an extended life, offsetting the initial cost. The cost of preservation might also be offset by available tax credits. An example of this might be requesting to replace historic wood elements like porch rails, siding, or windows with vinyl/plastic which in most instances is not appropriate. However, repairing the elements, or replacing with matching materials will meet the Standards, preserve historic elements, and give a longer lasting repair or product.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR CREATING A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT?

The process is governed by state law, PA 169 of 1970 as amended. The steps are as follows:

- 1) City Council appoints a historic district study committee and directs them to study the area of the city that Council thinks should be a historic district.
- 2) The study committee conducts an inventory (intensive level survey) of the study area; researches the history to determine the historic significance of the area; and evaluates whether a district should be created and if so what the boundaries of the district should be.
- 3) The information in step 2 is presented in the Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report which the committee then adopts and transmits to the State Historic Preservation Office and the Planning Commission for comments.
- 4) Not less than 60 days after the Preliminary Report is transmitted the study committee holds a public hearing.
- 5) After the public hearing the study committee completes a Final Historic District Study Committee Report and adopts the report.
- 6) The committee recommends to City Council whether or not a district should be created and submits their adopted Final Report to Council.
- 7) City Council considers the committee recommendation and whether or not to adopt an ordinance creating the district using the same procedures when considering creating other ordinances.

WHY DID THE SURVEY REPORT ORIGINALLY COUNT PROPERTIES BUT GET CHANGED TO RESOURCES IN THE PRELIMINARY STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT?

The intensive level survey looked at 105 parcels and recommended including all but 8 properties within the proposed district. However, per the National Register of Historic Places rules historic districts are made up of resources, not just parcels of land. A historic resource within a historic district is defined as, "A building, site, object, or structure evaluated as historically significant." To count just parcels would have violated the guidance issued by the State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service. Of the 97 parcels proposed for inclusion in the district described in the preliminary report, 36 have no historic resources on them. Of the total resources on the 97 parcels in the committee report, there are 101 contributing resources and 46 non-contributing resources.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE? HOW WAS THE COMMITTEE CREATED?

After a public invitation for citizens to apply, the Grosse Pointe Historic District Study Committee was appointed by City Council. It is comprised of Grosse Pointe area residents including architects and a representative of the Grosse Pointe Historical Society as required by law. The Committee's directive is to take an inventory and research the history of the study area to determine whether or not the area meets the criteria for a designated historic district. In accordance with state law the study committee is using the National Register of Historic Places criteria for inventorying and evaluating the potential district. The study committee will make a recommendation to City Council as to whether or not a district should be designated.

WHO DECIDES WHETHER A HISTORIC DISTRICT IS CREATED?

The elected governing body of a municipality makes the final decision. In the City of Grosse Pointe the governing board is the City Council.

DO HISTORIC DISTRICTS REDUCE HOME VALUES?

No. Historic Districts have generally been found to preserve and enhance property values. The Michigan Historic Preservation Network has studies by the State of Michigan that show property values increase in historic districts. [CLICK HERE](#) to view these publications.

Forbes Magazine offers an article from Aug 20, 2018 with additional citations on the subject. [CLICK HERE](#) to access a copy of this article.

IS THERE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE COST OF PRESERVATION PROJECTS?

Yes, but financial assistance is available only for work on properties found within a locally designated historic district. The Michigan State Historic Tax Credit, recently reinstated, allows approved rehabilitation work compliant with historic preservation standards to receive a credit from Michigan income taxes. The new law now provides a 25% tax credit for eligible work that can be deducted from Michigan income taxes as financial assistance to the owners of properties in a local historic district.

WILL A HISTORIC DISTRICT IMPACT MY PROPERTY TAXES?

No. Historic districts are not assessed any differently than other properties. Historic district designation does not change assessing or taxation laws and procedures. Under state law, City tax rates cannot be higher or lower in a historic district, or any other neighborhood for that matter, than any other residential properties. The presence of a Historic district does not change assessing or taxation laws and procedures. If property values in any area of the City increases higher than the rate of inflation, the Headlee Amendment/Proposal A to the State Constitution guarantees that taxable values are capped at the rate of inflation.

HOW WAS THE CURRENT STUDY AREA CHOSEN?

In the summer of 2020, the City Council chose the study areas focused on the area the City previously zoned as Estate Residential combined with similar, adjacent areas that showed potential for inclusion in a historic district in a 2012 city-wide historic reconnaissance level survey. Estate Residential zoning was created after the City's Master Plan in 2005 called for initiatives to preserve the remaining original large estates. The Estate district contains the largest homes that are considered the most recognizable attributes of Grosse Pointe's tradition and history and also the most at risk to demolition due to size and cost of maintaining such large homes. During the summer of 2020 there were several properties for sale or recently sold that were felt to demonstrate a risk to that goal of preservation. The Council also expressed concerns about recent and potential new home construction in the City that lacked the character of its long-standing homes. The Council approved a temporary moratorium on demolition and construction in the estate district at that time and extended that moratorium in January of 2021 to allow consideration of this historic district study process as a potential tool to further the goal of the City's Master Plan.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER AREAS OF THE CITY THAT MIGHT BE HISTORIC?

It is impractical and financially infeasible to intensively survey the entire city at one time. City Council may decide to direct the study of additional areas of the city in the future. The 2012 city-wide reconnaissance survey did make recommendations of additional areas worthy of study should City Council wish to do so.

HOW CAN AN AREA WITH MANY DIFFERENT ARCHITECTURAL STYLES BE HISTORIC?

It is common for historic districts to have multiple styles of architecture in them. The history of communities are represented through the built environment and it is typical for there to be a variety of architectural styles and buildings that when taken as a whole tell the story of a community. In order to be designated the district must meet one or more of several criteria need to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

ARE LOCAL REALTORS BEING CONSULTED ABOUT THE PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICT?

The City Council selected a realtor to be a member of the historic district study committee in order to ensure that perspective from realtors is considered.

HOW ARE RESIDENTS OF THE STUDY AREA INVOLVED AND APPRISED ABOUT THE PROCESS?

A letter was sent to all property owners in the study area in October 2020 advising them of the start of the survey and consideration of a local historic district. The letter invited attendance at an informational kickoff meeting held on October 20, 2020. As indicated at that first meeting, the City established a section of the City's website devoted to this process so that people who may not be able to attend the meetings could continue to stay informed throughout. In addition, The Grosse Pointe News and Grosse Pointe Times have written several articles on the topic, and the City has included information in its weekly informational eblasts that anyone can sign up for on the website.

Notices will be sent again to property owners ahead of the official and required public hearing held by the Study Committee, and also before the City Council after the Study Committee's recommendation. Public hearings are the formal opportunity for any member of the public to register their opinion on the record for consideration.

Prior to a public hearing, at a date to be determined in March, the City will schedule another informational meeting intended for residents of the area. This meeting is an opportunity for residents to learn about historic districts and how they work.

All meetings of the City Council and Study Committee are public with an opportunity for public comments. Any resident can provide their point of view during the public comment period of all Study Committee and City Council meetings.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF KIDORF PRESERVATION CONSULTING HIRED IN THE STUDY COMMITTEE/LOCAL DESIGNATION PROCESS?

Kristine Kidorf of Kidorf Preservation Consulting was contracted by the City to provide technical expertise to the city and the committee regarding the National Register Criteria, state law, the local designation process, and architectural history. Kidorf Preservation has assisted the Study Committee in compiling the required intensive level survey. The consultant does not influence the decision of the study committee or City Council.

HOW DOES THIS CHANGE THE CITY APPROVAL PROCESS IF THE CITY COUNCIL APPROVES CREATING A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

First the City Council would have to appoint members to a Historic Preservation Commission ("Commission"). The Historic District Commission which is comprised of city residents serve for three-year terms (staggered initially).

After a district is approved, the Commission would implement procedures for reviewing external alterations to properties within the historic district through adoption of Secretary of Interior standards and any Grosse Pointe specific design guidelines.

When a property owner in a historic district has exterior work contemplated, an applicant will submit the paperwork to the City for review. If it does not trigger a historic preservation review or if it is minor work in compliance with the standards, City staff can approve the permits within days. If it is a more significant project, the plan would be submitted to the Historic Commission for review.

WHAT CRITERIA WILL THE COMMISSION USE WHEN REVIEWING WORK?

The Commission will primarily use The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, found here: <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation.htm>. Using these criteria will ensure consistency of decisions throughout the district. Locally developed design guidelines will also be used once developed and approved. Design guidelines address building components, materials, and neighborhood context in order to accommodate the architectural styles found in the district. The guidelines may address specific architectural styles as well.

HOW QUICKLY WILL REVIEWS HAPPEN?

Commissions typically delegate a list of minor work items to city staff to review and approve for issuance of permits. Those items can be reviewed in a few days or less. Commissions normally consider applications monthly and make decisions at public meetings. Under the law, commissions may not take more than 60 days to act on a complete application.

DO ALL PROPERTIES IN THE DISTRICT HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE REVIEW PROCESS EVEN IF THEY ARE NEWER? WILL NEW CONSTRUCTION ON VACANT LOTS HAVE TO BE REVIEWED? IS WORK IN BACK YARDS REVIEWED?

Yes. Exterior work on ALL properties within the district, regardless of contributing or non-contributing status, front or back yards, will be reviewed by the Historic District Commission to ensure that the proposed work is compatible with the character of the district.

WILL BASIC MAINTENANCE BE REVIEWED?

No, as long as maintenance consists of repair and will not change the material, configuration, or appearance of a property it does not need to be reviewed. For example, tuckpointing with mortar that matches the existing mortar will not need to be reviewed.

ARE INTERIOR CHANGES REVIEWED?

No, interior remodeling is not under the purview of a historic district. Changes to exterior openings that affect the exterior appearance that might be desired as a consequence of a interior remodeling are reviewed. For example, due to a kitchen remodeling, a exterior door or window might be moved. Only the door or window change would be reviewed, not the entire kitchen remodeling.

IS EXTERIOR PAINTING REVIEWED AND ARE THERE PAINTING RESTRICTIONS? WILL PAINT COLORS BE REGULATED?

Paint colors are not reviewed unless specified in the enacting historic preservation ordinance. Neither the City or nor its historic preservation expert recommend that an ordinance regulating paint color be adopted. Repainting painted surfaces such as wood trim would not be reviewed. Whether to paint would only be reviewed if a property owner is proposing to paint a surface that was not previously painted like brick.

WHAT ARE THE RESTRICTIONS FOR POOLS, AWNINGS, VINYL SIDING, LANDSCAPING, TREE REMOVAL, RAILINGS?

Guidance/restrictions on some specific types of work can be addressed in design guidelines adopted by the Historic Commission when it is established. Prior to guidelines being approved all work will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine if the specific project will meet *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. For example, vinyl siding might be appropriate on some properties but not others depending on the existing conditions, age and history of the property.

DO I HAVE TO RESTORE MY HOUSE BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS WHEN IT WAS ORIGINALLY BUILT?

No, the purpose of local historic district designation is to retain as much of the original historic material that existed in the district at the time the district was established while still allowing for modern living.

HOW CAN THE SAME STANDARDS BE APPLIED TO DIFFERENT STYLES OF BUILDINGS?

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings are crafted in a manner that is meant to be applied to a variety of historic properties of different architectural styles. This ensures that changes to historic properties preserve historic fabric so that there is an accurate representation of the history the properties convey.

WHAT IF I WANT TO BUILD AN ADDITION, A NEW GARAGE OR AN APARTMENT ON TOP OF OUR GARAGE?

Creation of a historic district does not change any allowable use or construction as permitted in the City building and zoning code. The proposed accessory dwelling unit, for example, would need to meet all requirements of the underlying zoning. This would determine, among other things, whether the use itself is allowed and the permitted maximum height for the structure. All new buildings would need to meet zoning and building requirements such as setback as found in City codes.

Being in a historic district submits those types of projects to the additional review of whether they meet *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*.

WHAT IF I WANT TO COMBINE OR SPLIT LOTS?

Creation of a historic district does not change whether or not you can split or combine a lot. Land Divisions and Combinations are governed by the State Land Division Act and Section 70-11 of the City's Code of Ordinances. Properties zoned Estate Residential have additional requirements to maintain minimum lot sizes. The City would evaluate and approve or deny and approved/denied based on these existing criteria.

WHAT HAPPENS IF EXTERIOR CHANGES ARE MADE WITHOUT THE COMMISSION'S APPROVAL?

The requirements of a historic district are an added layer to the existing building permit process. The City's Building Inspector is in charge of ensuring compliance with City construction requirements including any added historic preservation requirements.

WILL THERE BE INSPECTIONS AND WHO WILL INSPECT WORK?

Inspections will be conducted by the City's Building Inspector as part of the permit process.

IS THERE A WAY TO APPEAL THE DECISION OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION?

If an applicant does not agree with the commission's decision, the applicant can appeal to the State Historic Preservation Review Board and ultimately to the circuit court. Non-applicants that do not agree with a commission's decision can appeal directly to circuit court.

ARE COSTS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION REQUIREMENTS TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION?

Yes. The Secretary of the Interior Standards for historic preservation review have this introductory paragraph:

The Standards are applied to projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) also offers guidance about economic hardship that the Commissions use when evaluating applications. Please [CLICK HERE](#) to view the State Historic Preservation Office Guidance on Economic Hardship

and Feasibility Considerations. As noted, the Secretary of Interior's standards reference the need for "reasonable" application of the standards.

CAN A HISTORIC PROPERTY EVER BE DEMOLISHED?

Demolition of a historic property within a historic district can be permitted under certain circumstances. Here is a sample of criteria that can be used to issue a *Notice to Proceed* by the commission: [CLICK HERE](#) to view a Sample Notice to Proceed.

CAN THE CITY PROVIDE TECHNICAL RESOURCES OR GUIDANCE TO PROPERTY OWNERS SUCH AS A LIST OF CONTRACTORS?

Yes. Two non-profit organizations provide lists of contractors, the Michigan Historic Preservation Network and Brick and Beam Detroit (see below).

In addition, Historic District Commission members and staff will have experience with historic properties and construction and will be able to offer guidance to applicants to make the review process as easy as possible.

The Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) has access to the historic resource council directory that contains listings for contractors and other preservation experts. [CLICK HERE](#) to access this resource.

Brick and Beam is a community for building rehabbers of all levels and aims to support rehab in Detroit by sharing knowledge, building talent, and providing access to resources you might need. [CLICK HERE](#) for a network of those that are doing home rehabilitation in the Detroit area and an additional list of contractors.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT HISTORIC PRESERVATION?

Michigan's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) provides articles and educational materials that offer guidance, context, and background about Michigan's historic resources. [CLICK HERE](#) to access additional resources and general publications about preservation.