

Benefits of Preservation Designation

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is the duly appointed municipal commission that represents the interest of the community in maintaining the architectural and historical integrity of local historic property. Working with property owners and municipal agencies, the HPC helps to preserve designated historic buildings and structures by reviewing any proposed exterior changes that will be visible from a public way.

Local Historic Property designations represent one of the strongest forms of protection for cultural resources in the community. Historic designations have helped communities promote the preservation and responsible treatment of significant historical and architectural resources regardless of ownership or use. Historic property designations protect buildings, structures, and archaeological sites from the threat of demolition and inappropriate exterior alteration.

Through the designation process, community leaders and residents will have the opportunity to articulate the justification and benefits of an LHP. In its official capacity, the Historic Preservation Commission will refer to these statements to guide and direct its actions.

There are many benefits to designating an LHP in the community beyond the primary responsibility for exterior review. There are four broad ways in which historic district and historic properties commissions can serve their communities.

Under the statute, historic property commissions may “promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public” through the preservation and protection of significant historic resources. Understanding the broad range of these benefits can help the potential historic property owner understand the advantages of listing a property as a locally historic.

1. Educational

Preserving important historic resources creates a visible public connection with the community’s heritage. Historic buildings are memory sites that preserve the human stories of people who built, lived in, or worked in the buildings. HPCs have the opportunity to highlight the presence of historic buildings to represent and interpret the events, personages, and lifestyles of the past. Educational activities can take the form of publications, walking tours, school programs, or collaboration with other community organizations.

2. Cultural Welfare

Preserving historic buildings adds to the architectural and visual richness of the community, displaying the roots of its character and diversity. As a tangible link to tradition and

innovation, LHDs and LHPs help to create a strong sense of place. The public awareness of history and tradition can promote community involvement, education, and interaction.

3. Economic Welfare

Preserving historic resources provides a promise of stability and protects the community from radical change. Property values within designated districts tend to remain more stable through periods of economic volatility and show stronger appreciation over the long term. Other economic benefits may include well-maintained infrastructure, a stronger neighborhood identity, increased tourism, and more thoughtful and creative design of new construction in the district.

4. General Welfare

LHD and LHP designations contribute to the general welfare of the community in less obvious ways as well. The benefits of historic designation may include:

a. Environmental Impact

Preserving older buildings is a wise use of infrastructure, land, and non-renewable resources. Preservation entails an investment in the existing built environment rather than using land and resources to build new. Preserving and reusing existing buildings makes better use of tax dollars by reducing the need for new roads, sewers, and utilities. Avoiding demolition reduces landfill waste. Historic preservation is an important part of “smart,” or sustainable, growth.

b. Visual Impact

LHD and LHP designations help to preserve traditional development patterns – dense business districts, walkable neighborhoods, distinct villages, and rural farms. The community’s distinct architectural heritage creates a rich spatial context and may encourage the use of compatible materials and forms in new construction.

c. Social Impact

The historic designation process encourages residents and property owners to take an active role in defining the future of the community. Historic buildings and neighborhoods provide well-built and human-scaled environments that are attractive places to live, work, or visit.