



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COMMISSION

Town of Concord, Massachusetts

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a Local Historic District designation and a National Register designation?

A National Register designation is purely honorary and offers no protection for districts or landmarks. Local historic district designation offers protection against demolition and insensitive alterations through a certificate of appropriateness process, which includes a review of proposed alterations and other construction in a public meeting forum.

How is a local historic district created?

Local Historic Districts in Concord can be enlarged/reduced and new districts may be created by a two-thirds vote at any regular or special Town Meeting.

What are the benefits of a local historic designation?

Local historic designation is one of the best ways to protect the historic character of buildings, streetscapes and neighborhoods from inappropriate alterations, incompatible new construction, and other changes – including demolition.

A local historic designation offers the assurance that the distinctive architecture and aesthetic value inherent in the historic resource will remain for the enjoyment of future generations. Local historic districts encourage continuity of design, pride of ownership, and help bring an element of predictability to older, established neighborhoods.

The residents of historic properties and historic districts are usually proud of their unique structures and more often than not consider themselves stewards as much as owners. Local historic designation offers property owners an appropriate and time-tested way to preserve these important community assets from inappropriate alteration.

If my house is included in the local historic district, does that mean I have to make it look more historic?

No, you can maintain the current look of your house as long as you would like. The purpose of local historic district is to retain as much of the historic material that exists in the district at the time it is designated, while still making the structure comfortable and useful for modern living. There is no requirement for property owners to remove later additions or put back missing features.

What kinds of things are reviewed by a historic district commission?

Changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way are subject to review by the Commission. Interior changes, landscaping, replacement in-kind/ordinary maintenance and changes to exterior features not visible from a public way are not reviewed.

Paint color is reviewed by the Commission, only when a change in color is proposed. An application is not required to repaint a building or structure the same (existing) color as there will be no change to the building's exterior appearance.

Can new buildings and additions be built in a local historic district?

Yes. Visit any one of Concord's local historic districts and you will likely find new buildings and a number of additions to historic houses. New construction is encouraged to be compatible with the existing district, and yet distinct, so that residents and visitors alike can tell that it is a 21st century addition or structure.

If I live in a historic district can I replace my windows?

Maintaining original windows retains the historic character of your building. For this reason, restoration of historic windows is generally preferred to replacement. However, if restoration is not feasible because the windows are deteriorated beyond repair, are non-historic or cost prohibitive, window replacement is an option. Replacement guidelines specify that such replacements be comparable to the original windows in terms of material, design, size and configuration, as much as possible.

Who are the members of the historic districts commission?

The Commission consists of five voting and five associate members appointed by the Select Board to serve rotating five-year terms.

How are decisions by the Commission reached?

Decisions are based on guidelines that the Commission periodically updates. The guidelines are drawn from standards at the State and Federal levels, members' understanding of historical architectural styles, and each member's sense of design. The guidelines help insure that changes are made in harmony with the existing neighborhood and will preserve the historic integrity of structures and neighborhoods.

What will happen to the value of my property if it is included in a local historic district?

Property values are determined by a variety of market factors, including influences extending

beyond historic preservation; but studies around the country suggest that property values stay the same or increase faster in local historic districts compared to similar, non-designated areas. Even if your home's price doesn't rise, it's less likely to fall if your neighborhood is in a historic district. That's because historic neighborhood designations help ensure that the aspects that make the area attractive to home buyers will be protected over time by explicit design limits on such things as demolitions and out-of-character exterior remodeling, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

My house is not historic, why would it be included in a local historic district?

Local Historic District boundaries are based on the architectural character of neighborhoods and streetscapes that contribute to the overall historic nature of the Town of Concord. That vision remains in focus in neighborhoods that have preserved a unity of overall design, location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Your house may be fairly new, but its location in a neighborhood that contributes to the character of Concord warrants its inclusion in the local historic districts. The review of exterior renovations, as well as new construction in historic districts provide the opportunity for the continued evolution of distinguished architecture and craftsmanship in Concord.

If I and my neighbors already maintain the historic character of our properties, why do we need to be in a local historic district?

By having a local historic district, you can be assured that a new property owner across the street from your house will also maintain the historic character of the neighborhood.