

## What is a local historic district?

Local historic districts are areas in which historic buildings and their settings are protected by public review. They encompass buildings deemed significant to the community's cultural fabric. It is a grassroots designation that is generated and administered by local residents. In order to establish a local historic district, the local unit of government passes an ordinance, which gives local legislative bodies the legal ability to regulate the construction, addition, alteration, repair, moving, excavation and demolition of resources in a local historic district. With the ordinance in place, a historic district commission (HDC) is then established; it serves as an architectural review committee and reviews all exterior work of buildings within the district. The HDC is made up of local residents.

## Where are our historic districts?

In Owosso, we have one local historic district, the Downtown Owosso Historic District, which includes over one hundred structures: A map of this district is attached.

**For additional maps, information, and details of the historic district, contact the Building Department. References and listings of design professionals are also available.**



## What is reviewed?

The HDC reviews only exterior changes to buildings in the historic district. This may include features that are added, removed or altered. It does not include basic maintenance or repairs such as painting, repair of a broken window, or replacement of rotted clapboards.

Examples of changes that require HDC review:

- Changes to windows or doors – moving, replacing, adding or removing
- Removal of key historic features such as brackets, towers, gables, or trim
- Siding changes
- Awnings/signs
- Reroofing exposed roofs (unless replacing existing material)
- Additions or new construction
- Demolition or moving of structures
- Fences
- Porches/decks
- Painting (other than matching coats)

In making its reviews, the HDC follows the **Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation**, which include ten broad guidelines that apply to all types of structures. To understand more about them, go to: [www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/rhb](http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/rhb).

## What is the review procedure?

Application for project approval should be made before work begins, materials are purchased, or a building permit is issued. An application may be picked up at the city building department office. The HDC staff liaison, Adam Zettel, is available in the office or by phone to provide guidance through the application and review process as well as to

## Review procedure, continued

offer advice on appropriate work. Once the application is received, it may be approved directly by staff. More complex projects will be reviewed by the HDC at its regular monthly meeting (held on the third Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. in the city council chambers). The deadline for applications is the previous Monday at 10:00 a.m.

The HDC has four options when a project comes before it for review. It can table the application if more information is needed; issue a “denial,” a “notice to proceed,” or a “certificate of appropriateness.” A denial means the proposed work is inappropriate and does not meet the standards for rehabilitation. A notice to proceed means the work may be inappropriate, but for specific reasons the HDC is allowing the work to proceed. A certificate of appropriateness means the proposed work is appropriate and meets the standards for rehabilitation.

If the HDC tables or denies the application, the applicant may make any suggested changes to its plan and resubmit the application for another review. Such changes, if desired by all parties, may be made at the HDC meeting. The applicant has the right to appeal the HDC's decision in accordance with Michigan Public Act 169.

After the staff or HDC reviews and approves the project, a certificate of appropriateness is issued and the applicant may obtain the necessary building permits. There is no charge for the review process or the final certificate of appropriateness.

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## What are the economic benefits?

Property owners in a local historic district enjoy several economic benefits. By managing how change occurs and ensuring that the historic character remains intact, property owners create a stable, quality environment. Studies show that property values typically increase compared to properties outside the historic district.

Property owners with contributing structures in a local historic district may be eligible for some state historic preservation financial assistance. However, this program has undergone a lot of change and is less likely to fund such projects. As such, the city is nominating the historic district for the National Register of Historic Places to make projects eligible for national tax credits. This incentive program was created to assist property owners with rehabilitation and maintenance expenses, and can be used for interior or exterior work. Qualified expenditures include painting, HVAC systems, kitchens, bathrooms, electrical or plumbing work, roofing, and general maintenance projects. For more information on state and federal incentives, go to <http://www.michigan.gov/mshda>. Before you begin a tax credit project, contact the city HDC staff liaison for assistance.

Because of these economic benefits, local historic districts generate development and community revitalization by encouraging investment and adaptive reuse of vacant or neglected buildings. This helps to create a vibrant community where residents choose to live, developers choose to invest and tourists choose to visit.

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## More preservation information

For more information on historic preservation, rehabilitation tax credits and technical guidance:

Michigan Historic Preservation Network –

[www.mhpn.org](http://www.mhpn.org)

State Historic Preservation Office –

[www.michigan.gov/shpo](http://www.michigan.gov/shpo)

National Trust for Historic Preservation –

[www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org)



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## Historic Districts

Our historic places tell the story of our community – who we are and how we lived. They are the tangible links to our past and the physical representation of the people and events that shaped our unique history. For many people, older buildings reinforce a sense of community because the buildings provide continuity and serve as repositories for shared experiences. We know that communities that retain their historic character and vibrant commercial areas attract businesses, young working people, families, and empty nesters because of the variety of workspaces, housing choices, cultural attractions, and entertainment options available. The purpose of historic preservation is not to freeze buildings to a certain time period but rather to sensitively evolve them as times change. By establishing a local historic district, we are able to protect the integrity of these important buildings, while allowing for changes to make them useful today.

