



Historic Preservation Frequently Asked Questions

Historic Preservation Commission – Application Process

I need to make changes to my property. Is there an application?

Yes, there are several types of applications, depending upon the scope of work. All applications can be found on the Historic Preservation website: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Planning-and-Zoning/Conservation-and-Preservation/Historic>

How do I submit an application?

Our application submission procedures have changed due to Covid-19. Please refer to our website for the most up-to-date information on submission procedures. Currently, we require:

- 10 printed copies dropped off in the HPC bin located in the lobby of the George Howard Building. Please email preservation@howardcountymd.gov to confirm copies were dropped off.
- A pdf version of the application must also be emailed to preservation@howardcountymd.gov.

Both of these items are required by the deadline date, no later than 5:00pm.

What are your deadlines and when are meetings?

The Commission generally meets the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm. The application deadline is 22 days before the meeting, which always falls on a Wednesday. Sometimes meeting dates change, so please always refer to the “Meeting Schedule and Application Deadline” tab on the website for the most up-to-date information: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/Departments/Planning-and-Zoning/Conservation-and-Preservation/Historic>.

Prior to Covid-19, all meetings took place at the George Howard Building. Currently and until further notice, the meetings will be virtual through WebEx.

What should I do if I have to make emergency repairs?

First, fill out an application. Then please contact DPZ. Depending upon the timeframe, we may be able to add your emergency application to an HPC meeting or process it online through the 5-day Minor Alterations process. You can reach all DPZ/HPC Staff at preservation@howardcountymd.gov.

Historic Preservation Commission – Guidelines and Alterations

If I have a “non-historic” house and my property is located in the local historic district, will I have to go before the Commission to make changes to my house or property?

Yes. The HPC reviews exterior changes to all properties in the district. The Ellicott City and Lawyers Hill Historic District Design Guidelines provides recommendations for all properties located in the districts.

Does every change I make to my property have to go before the Historic Preservation Commission?

Interior changes are not reviewed by the HPC, unless the property owner seeks tax credits for interior structural repairs, such as work to the foundation. Generally, work that is classified as routine maintenance does not require approval by the HPC (although some routine maintenance might be eligible for tax credits,

which is a process that requires pre-approval from the HPC). Most exterior alterations do require approval from the HPC.

Does the Commission review work to the backs of buildings or other areas that can't be seen from the public right of way? Yes. The HPC reviews exterior changes, whether or not they are visible from public roads or neighboring properties.

What happens if I do work that is not approved by the Commission?

If a property owner undertakes work that requires HPC approval, without the approval of the HPC, or if the work is not done appropriately based on the HPC's approval, the alterations could be in violation of the County Code and subject to a code enforcement case.

Can I change the paint color of my house? Is the Commission going to tell me what color to use?

Yes, you can change your paint colors and no, the Commission will not tell you what color to use. The Ellicott City and Lawyers Hill Historic District Design Guidelines provide recommendations for paint colors, which the Commission will use to determine if the new colors are appropriate. The Lawyers Hill Historic District Design Guidelines include a color chart which offers a palette of paint color options that are appropriate for different architectural styles in the district.

Will the Commission review alterations I make to my yard or landscape?

Yes. Landscape and site alterations are reviewed by the HPC for approval. Routine yard and landscape maintenance generally do not require approval. The Design Guidelines explain what type of landscape and site alterations require approval.

Isn't it more expensive to preserve historic features than to replace them?

Not necessarily. Much depends on the feature, its design, the material and how well the house has been maintained through its life. Working with a contractor experienced in dealing with historic resources can help identify cost effective options. It is also important to remember that cost includes not only the upfront cost, but also the long-term cost of maintaining the feature. Quality materials may cost more upfront, but last longer and offer cost savings over the long term.

Aren't new windows much more energy efficient than historic windows?

Not necessarily. Studies have shown that adding a storm window to a weather-stripped historic window can result in equal, or sometimes better, energy performance compared to a new insulated dual-pane window. Reusing historic windows is a green activity because it prevents the old materials from being sent to the landfill and prevents new materials from being harvested to create new windows.

Will the Commission allow me to use modern products like vinyl, composite siding, and composite decking?

It depends on the need to use the product and the product itself. The purpose of the local historic district is to preserve historic integrity, which includes original materials. Original wood siding and wood porch decking should be repaired and painted whenever possible.

If wood siding must be replaced, it should not be covered with vinyl siding. Vinyl siding can trap water vapor and hide damage to the original wood siding caused by moisture. The HPC does consider composite siding when replacement is necessary but requires that the replacement siding convey the appearance of the historic material it replaces. Composite deck boards are similarly considered as an exception to wood deck boards when replacement of original material is necessary.

Can properties be demolished in the local historic district?

Yes. However, because historic buildings are irreplaceable, the HPC will consider approving demolition of historic buildings only after all possible alternatives to preserve the structure are exhausted. The Commission's Rules of Procedure contain more information on what evidence must be submitted in an application for demolition.

Will local historic district designation hurt my property's value?

No. In contrast, studies have found that historic district designation can actually increase property values. This occurs when property changes must follow design guidelines and undergo design review, which results in the preservation of the community's historic character.

Are there tax benefits for property owners in local historic districts?

Yes. Contributing (historic) structures within a local district are eligible for County property tax credits for certain types of repairs. The County property tax credit is 25% of eligible expenses equaling \$500 or more and must be pre-approved by the HPC. For example, if a homeowner makes roof repairs that cost \$5,000, then \$1,250 could be deducted from the property tax bill.

If I am not planning on applying for tax credits, can I opt out of having my project reviewed by the commission?

No. All exterior changes in a local historic district are subject to review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission, regardless of whether or not the property owner seeks tax credits.

Can I cut down a tree in a Historic District?

Trees larger than 12 dbh (diameter breast height) of inches or greater cannot be cut down without a Certificate of Approval from the HPC unless removal is in accordance with an approved subdivision plan, site development plan, forest conservation plan, or grading plan. The Guidelines for each district explain which activities require approval and which do not.

General Historic Preservation - Districts

How is a local historic district different from a National Register district?

National Register Districts are honorary. National Register listing does not protect against demolition, interior or exterior changes. Exterior and interior changes are not subject to review and approval, unless the property owner seeks tax credits or a project utilizes federal funding.

In contrast, exterior changes in a local historic district are subject to review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). This protects against demolition and exterior changes that could result in a loss of historic integrity.

Howard County has two local historic districts – Ellicott City and Lawyers Hill – both of which are also National Register Districts. The Savage Mill National Register District was formed in 1975 and is the only Howard County National Register District that does not also include a local historic district.

Why create a local historic district if we already have a National Register district?

The local historic district, which requires review and approval for exterior changes, gives greater protection to historic resources than the honorary National Register district. There are no requirements preventing historic resources in the National Register district from being demolished or altered in such a way that destroys their historic integrity.

What is the difference between a property in a local historic district and a property on the Historic Sites Inventory?

Properties on the Howard County Historic Sites Inventory are NOT subject to review and approval by the HPC, unless the property owner seeks tax credits. Properties listed on the inventory are eligible for the County's 25% property tax credit (work must be pre-approved by the HPC).

Properties that are located in a local historic district (these may also have an Inventory number) are required to have all exterior alterations approved by the Historic Preservation Commission.

What is a Single Site Historic District?

A single site historic district is any one specific property designated by its owner and adopted by resolution of the County Council.

How old does my property have to be to be considered historic? Age is one consideration in determining if a property is historic. The County would generally consider properties dating to the 1940s and before as historic, but would also take into account architectural significance, historical value, and physical integrity. As a result, a property may be considered "old" but not "historic."

If we create a local historic district, does that mean I have to restore my house back to the way it was when it was first built?

No. Owners of historic district properties are not required to restore or repair their properties as a result of historic district designation, nor are they required to alter work that was completed before the district designation. Only new exterior changes are required to receive HPC review and approval.

Is there a certain percentage of property owners that must agree to establish a local historic district?

No, but a majority of owners must be interested in the local historic district being established. The Howard County Council must adopt the Boundary District on the Zoning Map and the designation by Resolution, which is a public process where public testimony can be given.

Can a property owner "opt out" of being included in a local historic district?

No. Once a community decides to establish a local historic district, the boundaries must be identified based on historic significance and not ownership. The district boundary should not include "donut holes" that intentionally exclude properties.