



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

# Frequently Asked Questions About the Landmarks Process



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## **What is an historic district?**

An historic district is an area of the city designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) that represents at least one period or style of architecture typical of one or more areas in the city's history; as a result, the district has a distinct "sense of place." Fort Greene, Greenwich Village, Jackson Heights, Mott Haven and St. George/New Brighton are examples of the more than 80 sections of the city that contain historic districts. Having a neighborhood designated preserves its physical nature and helps protect it from out-of-scale and inappropriate development.

## **Why was the Landmarks Law enacted?**

The Landmarks Law was enacted in 1965 in response to New Yorkers' growing concern that important physical elements of the city's history were being lost. Events like the demolition of the architecturally distinguished Pennsylvania Station in 1963 increased public awareness of the need to protect the city's architectural, historical and cultural heritage.



TREADWELL FARM HISTORIC DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

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## **What is the difference between a New York City historic district and a National Register district?**

A New York City district is overseen by the local Landmarks Preservation Commission and protects the character of the district through the local Landmarks Law. A National Register district is recognized through the U.S. Department of the Interior and administered by the New York State Historic Preservation Office. National Register of Historic Places listings are largely honorific and usually do not prevent alterations or demolition of structures within the district, but may entitle owners to tax benefits. Many, if not most of the city's historic districts are also on the State and National Registers.

## **If my neighborhood or building is designated, will I be required to restore my property?**

No. The LPC does not require restoration or force owners to return buildings to their original condition. The LPC only regulates proposed work on designated structures. It may, however, make recommendations for restorative treatment when other work is undertaken to the property.

## **Will I be restricted in the kind of changes I can make?**

Yes. New York City landmark designation does place additional restrictions on historic properties, which most often involve exterior changes. Designation is designed to protect and preserve properties and neighborhoods. This can be beneficial to a property owner by preventing inappropriate changes to neighboring buildings that could take away from property values and the ambiance or enjoyment of the property.

## **What procedures do I follow to make changes to my landmarked property?**

To make changes, you must apply for a permit from the LPC, which will review your plans and issue a permit or suggest appropriate alterations. The majority of LPC permits are for exterior work and can usually be issued within a few weeks.

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## **Does it cost more to maintain a landmarked building?**

It may. Although there can be an additional expense for historically appropriate repair and maintenance of designated buildings, property owners generally find the extra costs offset by higher resale revenue and property values.



DOUGLASTON HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT, QUEENS

## **Will living in a designated historic district raise my taxes?**

No. There is no evidence that those living in an historic district pay higher property taxes than residents outside of the district.

## **How does historic district designation affect real estate values?**

Studies all over the country show that designation improves property values. In 2003 the Independent Budget Office published a study showing that properties within designated New York City historic districts appreciate more in value over the long term than identical properties not in historic districts.

## **How does historic district designation affect development values within a district?**

Development is permitted in historic districts. Developers are subject to the same approval process by the Landmarks Commission as are other property owners. Even though development may be reviewed in terms of aesthetics, height and bulk, developers may benefit from the prestige and association that come with designation. To encourage sensitive alterations and renovations, federal and state tax credits are available. The real estate community markets historic properties in a way that places emphasis and greater value on the building's and neighborhood's special character.

## **Doesn't becoming a landmarked district speed up the process of gentrification?**

No. There are no definitive studies that prove this. By preserving and protecting existing historic structures, designation prevents rapid, out-of-scale development that often leads to displacement.

## **How does living in an historic district affect zoning?**

Zoning is a separate feature of a neighborhood's character. The zoning dictates how large a building may be, its general shape and use. The LPC oversees all changes in an historic district but does not regulate contemporary use.



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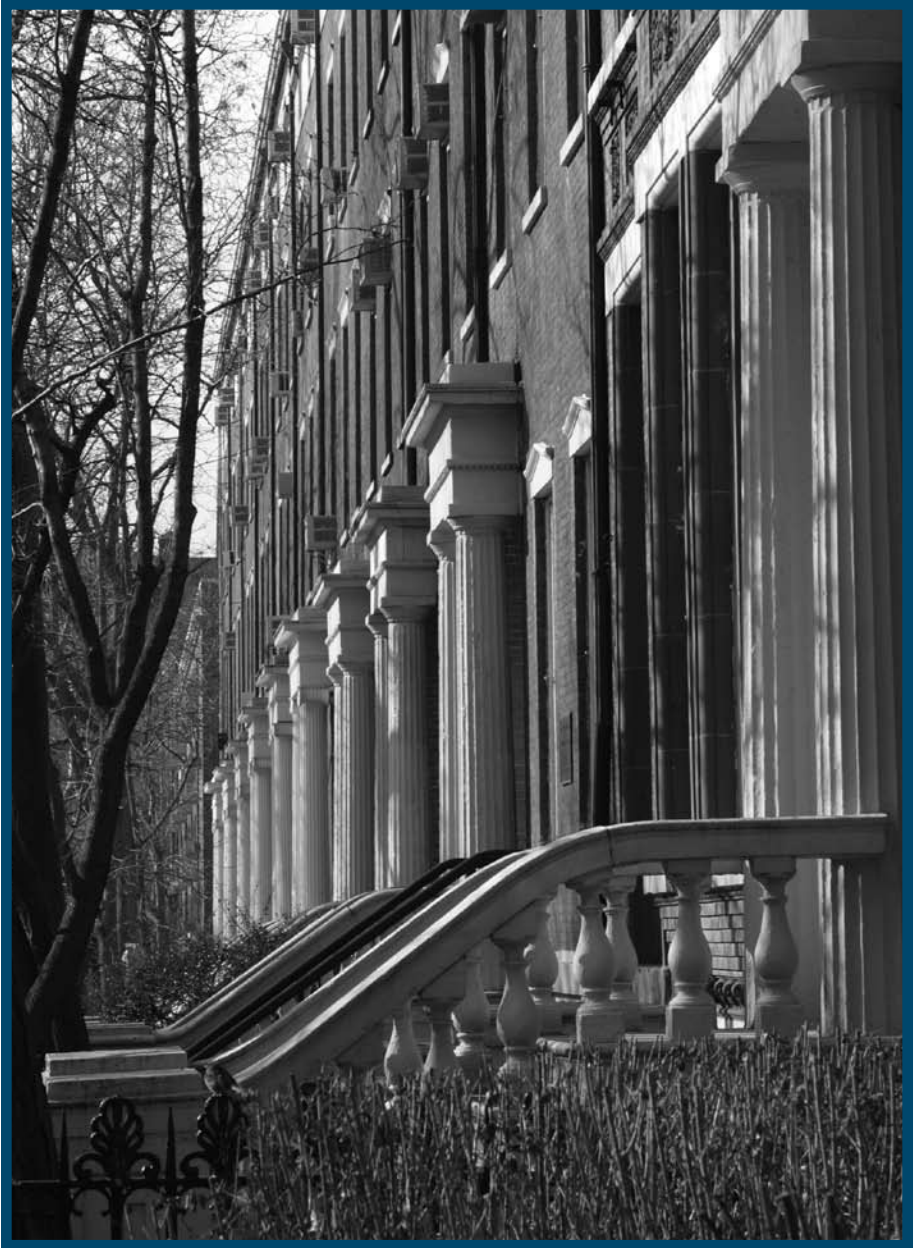
## How does a neighborhood become an historic district?

The process of designating an historic district starts when the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) begins to consider an area worthy of special protection. However, rarely does the designation of a neighborhood happen without substantial community involvement.

*HDC recommends that before following the steps below, the majority of the community and its elected representatives be involved in and supportive of the effort early in the process by organizing a community group to promote landmark designation.*

- When the public, a community member, or a group wishes an area or property to be considered for designation, a Request for Evaluation (RFE) must be submitted to the LPC. This request is a single-page form that asks for information about the property or area. The RFE can be downloaded off of the LPC Web site (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc>) or requested by phone (212-669-7817) or by mail (One Centre Street, New York, NY 10007).
- The LPC reviews the RFE, makes site visits, does further research and decides if a district is worthy of further consideration. The community can also make known to the LPC that there is strong support for this designation in the form of letters, phone calls or e-mails to the Commission. It is also recommended that community members meet with the LPC chair and staff to tour the neighborhood.
- Once the LPC decides that an area is worthy of further consideration, “calendarizing” is the first official step in the designation process. Calendarizing is the action of establishing that an item will be scheduled for a Public Hearing. This is also when boundaries of the potential district are proposed by the LPC.
- The Public Hearing is the opportunity for members of the community, elected officials and interested parties to give testimony for or against the designation of the proposed district. Sometime after the Public Hearing (in most cases), the LPC will take a vote on the district. If the vote is favorable, a Designation Report is issued and the new historic district is now protected.

- Once the historic district is designated, the designation is subject to review by the City Planning Commission (CPC) and to a vote by the City Council. The CPC's role is advisory only, but the City Council can approve, modify or overturn the designation.



GREENWICH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

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## About the Historic Districts Council

The Historic Districts Council is the citywide advocate for New York’s historic neighborhoods. We work to ensure the preservation of significant historic neighborhoods, buildings and public spaces in New York City, uphold the integrity of the New York City Landmarks Law and further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.

Originally founded in 1971 as a coalition of community groups from New York City’s designated historic districts, HDC has grown to become one of the foremost citywide voices for historic preservation. Following its mandate of community-based preservation advocacy, HDC works continuously to broaden and educate the preservation constituency — from producing zoning and architectural surveys of unprotected historic neighborhoods, to meeting with legislators and government officials, to creating educational programs on the techniques and strategies of neighborhood preservation.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City’s historic resources — its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The creation of the New York City Landmarks Law in 1965 acknowledged this and empowered the government to act to preserve buildings and sites that “possess special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of city, state or nation.” This preservation goal benefits not only ourselves but future generations of New Yorkers, and it guides the Historic Districts Council in all its actions.

More information is available in HDC’s signature publication, *Creating an Historic District: A Guide for Neighborhoods*, available on HDC’s Web site, [www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org) or by calling 212-614-9107.

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230 East 12th Street  
New York NY 10003  
tel 212-614-9107 fax 212-614-9127  
e-mail [hdc@hdc.org](mailto:hdc@hdc.org)  
[www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org)