



We Are Columbia

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## Design Preservation FAQs: What Designation Means for Prospective Homeowners

### Why are historic districts important?

Columbia's fifteen historic districts speak to the historic, architectural, and/or cultural development of the City. These qualities help make Columbia a unique and desirable place which is a benefit to both the property owners within a historic district and to the community as a whole. Studies have shown that houses within local historic districts are often worth more, appreciate faster, and retain more of their value than properties located outside of districts.

### How are historic districts created?

The creation of historic districts is always a neighborhood decision. At the neighborhood's request City Staff works with neighborhood residents to create individualized guidelines that define the level of designation, the district boundaries, and the specific items to be reviewed in the area. The adoption of the guidelines also requires recommendation by the Design/Development Review Commission (D/DRC) and the Planning Commission followed by adoption by City Council.

### What does Design Preservation overlay zoning include?

Design Preservation is the name for the zoning layer placed on historic properties or historic areas of the city in order to preserve their exterior historic appearance and protect them from destruction. Design Preservation can take several forms.

- 1) A **Landmark** is an individually designated building that is worthy of preservation because of its great importance to the City and its people, its association with important individuals or historic events or because its design or architectural style is unique or outstanding (*State House, City Hall, and First Baptist Church* are examples).
- 2) A **Landmark District** is a geographic area that is a distinctive area of the city that collectively contains a number of landmark and other historic buildings. (The area surrounding the *Hampton Preston and Robert Mills Houses* for example).
- 3) An **Architectural Conservation District** is a geographic area of the city that collectively contains a number of buildings constructed in a similar architectural style or sharing a simple time period of construction. (*Wales Garden* is an example).
- 4) A **Protection Area** is a geographic area that contains some historic buildings or landmarks, but contains a large number of either non-historic or marginal buildings also. (The *Governor's Mansion* area and the *Old Shandon/Lower Waverly District* are examples).

### What does Design Preservation regulate?

The *physical exterior appearance* of a designated landmark or a building and its site in a Design Preservation district is regulated. Depending on the level of designation, design preservation reviews: exterior changes,

additions/enclosures, fences/walls, signage, driveways/parking lots, demolition/relocation, and new construction. Work not visible from the public right-of-way and interior work is not reviewed.

### **How does a property owner know what work is appropriate in the district?**

Each Design Preservation district has its own set of design guidelines that set forth the standards of review for new projects. City Preservation Staff (preservation planners) and the Design/Development Review Commission (D/DRC) oversee the work conducted within historic districts and determine whether or not proposed work meets the guidelines. The property owner should consult the Preservation Staff to get approval before starting any exterior work.

### **What triggers when the City will review work on a property?**

Review is triggered when the owner applies for a building or zoning permit for exterior work. However, it is a good idea to check with the district's preservation planner first to see if the requested work is allowed in the area and to get clarification on the type of review required.

### **What type of review does my project require?**

Projects visible from the public right-of-way will either require staff level or Commission (D/DRC) review. City Staff (preservation planners) will help the applicant through the process, reviewing what is permissible at staff level and guiding projects that require more detailed review on to the D/DRC. Consulting a preservation planner early on may prevent delays in the construction/renovation process.

### **How does the Design/Development Review Commission process work?**

The D/DRC meeting is a public hearing that meets once a month and requires a legal advertisement for public notice. D/DRC staff (preservation planners) guide the applicant through the process and inform them of any deadlines and required application materials for review. At the meeting, the Commission hears from City Staff, the applicant, and members of the public wishing to speak about the proposal. Using the design guidelines, the Commission then makes a ruling -typically to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the request. Denials may be appealed to a court of competent jurisdiction within 30 days.

### **Will Design Preservation increase my taxes?**

Historic designation alone does not increase taxes. Property taxes are based on the assessed property value of the land plus the improvements. Historic designation may add to the desirability of a neighborhood, resulting in increased real estate market activity, which could then be reflected in higher assessed valuations by the County Assessor.

### **Does the City offer any financial incentives within Design Preservation areas?**

Yes. The City of Columbia offers a tax incentive program known as the Bailey Bill to encourage sensitive rehabilitation of historic buildings. If the homeowner invests 20% of the home's value back in to the home with preservation related qualifying expenses, then the assessed value of the property is abated for the next 20 years (i.e., the value of the property may increase over time, but it will continue to be taxed at the pre-rehabilitation assessed valuation for 20 years). More information about the Bailey Bill can be found at <https://www.columbiasc.net/planning-preservation/historic-incentives>.