



FACT SHEET #6: HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATIONS

What is a historic district?

In general, a historic district is a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development. Historic districts are found in large urban centers, smaller communities, and rural areas. A historic district may or may not have formal designation under a local historic preservation ordinance or other law which provides protection and/or preservation incentives.

Local citizens may refer to an older part of their community as “the historic district.” Signage or markers may identify it as a historic district, and local tourism promotional literature features the history of the neighborhood or commercial area; however, there is no legal protection nor are there incentives for the district’s preservation.

What is a local historic district and what does the designation mean?

A historic district ordinance is a local government’s instrument for creating a historic preservation review commission and setting forth its membership, functions, and responsibilities. Among the local commission’s duties are the identification and the designation of local historic districts. While the ordinances vary from city to city, the designations have similar effects on properties located within the district. Generally, when an owner plans to modify the exterior of a building in a local historic district, he/she must apply for a certificate of appropriateness from the local government. The local commission reviews these applications to determine if the proposed work is consistent with the established local design guidelines.

Several Oklahoma municipalities have adopted local historic district ordinances (*Tomorrow’s Legacy: Oklahoma’s Statewide Preservation Plan*, Figure #7: Oklahoma Municipalities with Historic Preservation-related Zoning Ordinances, <http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/stateplan.htm>). Some of them participate in the State Historic Preservation Office’s (SHPO) Certified Local Governments (CLG) program (<http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/clg.htm>). CLGs assume certain SHPO responsibilities, have a direct role in the nomination of properties to the National Register of Historic Places, and qualify for federal matching funds. To qualify for CLG status, the local government must enforce an ordinance that meets requirements of *Certified Local Governments for Oklahoma* (<http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/clg.htm>).

What is a National Register of Historic Places district and what does the designation mean?

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is the national list of sites, districts, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, or culture, maintained by the Secretary of the Interior under authority of the National Historic Preservation Act. The SHPO identifies and nominates properties, including historic districts, to the NRHP in accordance with National Park Service regulations (36 CFR Part 60). A residential neighborhood, a downtown commercial district, a rural environment, or a concentration of archeological sites in a particular drainage area are examples of historic districts included in the NRHP.

The NRHP criteria and a complete listing of Oklahoma's properties, including districts with the designation, are found in Oklahoma's National Register Handbook (<http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/nrhandbook.htm>). Many other districts are eligible for the NRHP and the SHPO can provide information about them. Some of these districts are included in the searchable list found at <http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/doesearch.php>.

Properties listed in the NRHP, either individually or as contributing resources to a historic district, realize the same benefits. The designation provides recognition of a property's significance; provides limited protection; makes property owners eligible in certain circumstances for federal and state rehabilitation tax credits; and, makes owners eligible to apply for federal matching grants (when funding is available). Listing in the NRHP puts no restrictions on a property owner about maintenance, alteration, demolition, use, or sale.

More information can be found in the following SHPO fact sheets.

Section 106 FAQ: <http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/factsheets/fs10sec106.pdf>

Tax Credits FAQ: <http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/factsheets/fs14tax.pdf>

National Register FAQ: <http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/factsheets/fs11nr.pdf>

In some cases, the local government may have designated a local district that closely coincides with the boundaries of an NRHP district. Property owners should inform themselves about which formal designations apply to them and what the designations mean.

NOTE: NRHP listing is not a prerequisite for local government designation of historic districts or individual landmarks under a local ordinance. National Register listing and local designation are not mutually exclusive.

What other sources provide helpful information about historic district designations?

For information from the National Park Service about the CLG program and historic districts, visit <https://www.nps.gov/clg/index.html>.

The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC), a nonprofit organization, is a primary source for information about local historic preservation ordinances, local historic preservation commissions, design review, and other topics. Visit their website at <https://napcommissions.org/>.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation provides important guidance in its Preservation Ordinance FAQ (<http://forum.savingplaces.org/learn/fundamentals/preservation-law/state-laws/enabling-local-ordinances>) and Local Preservation Laws (<http://forum.savingplaces.org/learn/fundamentals/preservation-law/local-laws>).



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