

Local Historic Districts: Fact or Fiction

1) If my house is a contributing structure in a Local Historic District (LHD), I won't be allowed to add onto my home.

FICTION: Designation does not prevent owners from making changes to their properties, and that includes building additions.

Designation does ensure that alterations and additions are in keeping with the special character of the area by confirming that they comply with the design guidelines created by the neighborhood. This happens through a process called design review, whereby the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) approves major changes that are planned for the district and issues Certificates of Appropriateness (COA). Local designation encourages sensitive development in the district and discourages unsympathetic changes from occurring.

2) If I live in a LHD, the city is going to tell me what color I can paint my house.

FICTION: Minor repairs and ordinary maintenance, such as repainting and repairing a roof with the same materials, does not require a COA.

A COA would be required for work that physically alters the appearance of the property, such as replacing windows and doors, installing artificial siding, enclosing a porch, or demolishing all or part of a structure. Interior changes that do not affect the outside appearance are not reviewed.

3) It will take longer to get construction permits from the city?

FACT: It may take slightly longer to get through the design review process once our neighborhood becomes a Local Historic District (LHD). But the increase in approval time will be minimal for the vast majority of projects. And LHD designation ensures that alterations, additions or demolitions are in keeping with special character of the neighborhood.

4) I will have to do renovations to my house to make it comply with the new design guidelines.

FICTION: Local Historic District designation will not require retrofitting. If a property owner elects to make an addition or an improvement to his/her property after designation the addition will need a Certificate of Appropriateness through a design review by the Historic Preservation Commission.

5) LHD designation will restrict how I'm able to use of my property.

FICTION: The use of your property is regulated by the City's zoning ordinance. Whatever uses are permitted by the zoning for the property are not affected by district designation. District designation is concerned with aesthetics, not the uses of the property.

6) If I live in a LHD, my taxes will increase.

FICTION: Designation of an area as a historic district alone does not increase property taxes. However, historic designation may have a positive impact on property values because of a form of insurance of future neighborhood quality.