

How do we keep the look and feel of our historic neighborhood? By becoming a Local Historic District.

The overwhelming concern voiced by Old Enfield residents is the loss of our old homes. The changing look of our neighborhood is resulting from insensitive remodels and demolitions that bring incompatible new construction that simply do not fit the character of Old Enfield. The only means available to us to stop these insensitive changes to our beloved neighborhood is to become a Local Historic District.

What is a local Historic District?

A local historic district is a zoning overlay for areas in which historic buildings and their settings are protected by public review. Historic district ordinances are local laws that are adopted by communities using powers granted by the state. Many communities in Texas have had this ordinance for a long time, Austin just passed such an ordinance last year. Inclusion in a historic district signifies that a property contributes to an ensemble that is worth protecting by virtue of its historic importance and/or architectural quality.

This designation offers the most protection for neighborhoods of historic and architectural significance by ensuring that exterior alterations are consistent and appropriate with the existing character of the neighborhood. It is the most effective legal means to protect the distinctive and significant characteristics (the historic character) of buildings, neighborhoods, streetscapes, and special landmarks from insensitive alterations and new construction, as well as outright demolition. It encourages changes and new designs that are compatible with the area's historic distinctiveness.

How is this different from the National Register District?

A National Register District only provides limited protection from adverse effects by federal or state involved projects. If there is no such involvement, a listing in the National Register does not limit an owner's handling of the property. Owners of private properties listed in the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose provided that no Federal monies are involved. This designation does not prevent insensitive: remodels, new construction or demolitions.

The primary strength of a local historic district designation comes from the creation of design standards that we, Old Enfield, create. These standards are tailored to our specific preservation needs, they can be as strict or as loose as we wish.

Design guidelines:

Design standards are both written and graphic guidelines for property owners to use when considering the appropriateness of exterior alterations, additions, demolitions, and new construction in a local historic district. These standards provide protection of character-defining exterior features of a property, but not historic interiors.

Design standards are the key support materials for administering a Local Historic District through a review process. Review of proposed changes to properties against the standards ensures that work on a property, either remodels to contributing homes or new construction, is appropriate to the special character of our neighborhood.

Property values:

Historic district zoning can help to enhance property values by maintaining the neighborhood's character, and it benefits property owners by protecting them from inappropriate changes made by other owners that might destroy the special qualities of the neighborhood.

Research has shown that Local districts protect the investments of owners and residents. Buyers know that the aspects that make a particular area attractive will be protected over a period of time. One study considered the effects of historic designation on residential property values in nine Texas cities. Results show that historic preservation generally has a positive impact on property values. Critics of historic preservation often charge that designation negatively impacts property values. The evidence from Texas suggests just the opposite; designation enhances value. (Historic Preservation and Residential Property Values: An Analysis of Texas Cities, Leichenko, Coulson, and Listokin 2001). "Historic designation is thought to have a positive impact on property values by providing a form of insurance of future neighborhood quality." "assurance that its desirable historic amenities will be fostered into the future by public regulation".

Sixty percent of homeowners within the proposed district must approve the formation of a local historic district in order for one to exist. If not, there are no other means for us to stop insensitive remodels & new constructions or demolitions of contributing properties. By approving the formation of a District, each homeowner is agreeing that they want to keep the look and feel of this special place we call home.

The Association will be approaching this project much the same way we did with the National Register campaign. We will be holding many informational meetings, which everyone is highly encouraged to attend. Everyone, not just contributing property owners, need to learn all the facts regarding Local Historic status because this change in zoning will affect everyone. There are many details that every property owner needs to know

and understand. The Board is working closely with the City's Preservation Officer to conduct a series of public meetings, produce literature and become subject matter experts so we can all answer the many questions that will arise. Information about the first of these meetings will be sent out this spring.

A survey regarding neighborhood interest in Local Historic Districts is included in this newsletter and also online at www.oldenfield.org. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. This survey is an important first step in gauging neighborhood interest in Local Historic Districts and the preservation of Old Enfield in the coming years.

Through factual information we can move forward with protecting the character of Old Enfield.