



# FAQs about Local Historic Districts

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

### **What is a local historic district?**

A local historic district (LHD) in the City of Buffalo is an historic district designated through the City's preservation ordinance, Chapter 337 of the Buffalo City Code. An LHD is generally a zoning overlay which requires the review of proposed changes to the exterior of a designated property. This required review of exterior changes provides the community a means to make sure that growth, development, and change take place in ways that respect the important historical, architectural, and environmental characteristics of their historic built environment.

### **What is the process to designate a local historic district?**

Community education and engagement takes place first. Next, a survey is completed to identify and document historic resources, determine geographic boundaries of a district, and to articulate the significance of the area. An application is then made to the City of Buffalo Preservation Board which will hold an advertised public hearing. If the Preservation Board recommends the district for designation, then the application goes to the Buffalo Common Council and has a second public hearing before the Legislation Committee. If recommended for designation after that hearing, it then goes to a full vote before the Common Council. The public again has an opportunity to express concerns, opinions, support, etc. by either speaking at one of the scheduled public hearings or by submitting a statement to the Preservation Board and/or Common Council.

### **Isn't Elmwood already a local historic district?**

No, Elmwood is not already a local historic district. The proposed local level Elmwood Historic District is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as two separate districts, Elmwood (west) Historic District and Elmwood (east) Historic District. While a significant honor, listing in the National Register does not come with any type of protection to the listed properties nor does it provide neighbors and community members the opportunity to voice their opinion about the future of the district. It is only through local level designation that neighbors and the community can have a voice in their future and the ability to intervene in the demolition and inappropriate development of their community.

### **What are the other local historic districts in Buffalo?**

The City of Buffalo has 139 local landmarks and 16 LHDs. Included in this list are:

Delaware Historic District, Allentown HD, Linwood HD, West Village HD, Theater HD, Olmstead Parks and Parkways HD, Cobblestone HD, Hamlin Park HD, 500 Block of Main St HD, Genesee Gateway HD, Larkin HD, Upper Black Rock HD, High Street HD, Michigan Sycamore HD, and Broadway Fillmore HD.  
Fillmore

## **Why would a neighborhood want to become a local historic district?**

Creating an LHD can preserve neighborhood character and improve property values in older neighborhoods where many older homes still have most of their original architectural integrity. Historic districts are also less vulnerable to market volatility from market fluctuations and economic downturns.

## **HOW THE PROCESS WORKS**

### **Do I have a say as to whether my property is included in a local historic district?**

Before an historic district is designated, all residents, property owners in the proposed local district have the opportunity to express their views in public hearings with the Buffalo Preservation Board and with the Common Council. But keep in mind that the Preservation Board and Council Members are evaluating a landmark nomination based on how successfully the nomination meets the landmark criteria listed in the preservation ordinance and not on personal preference.

### **Who will be making decisions once the district is in place?**

Landmarked properties, whether they are in historic districts or individually landmarked, are administered by the Buffalo Preservation Board. Established by the preservation ordinance (Chapter 337 of the Buffalo City Code) the Board is an 11-member committee that includes appointments from the Mayor and the Common Council President, as well as an appointments from the Buffalo History Museum and Preservation Buffalo Niagara.

## **PROPERTY CHANGES**

### **How does the Preservation Board review exterior changes?**

The Buffalo Preservation Board uses the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation to review projects. The Standards for Rehabilitation provide a list of ten guiding principles that must be met when rehabilitating an historic property for new and/or continued use. The Standards for Rehabilitation encourage the retention and repair of the character defining features of a property, while also allowing for in-kind replacements and necessary upgrades to ensure it will be safe and comfortable for its current inhabitants. To learn more about the Standards for Rehabilitation, you can visit [http://bit.ly/SOI\\_Rehab](http://bit.ly/SOI_Rehab)

### **Will I be required to restore my property to some prior period in its history?**

No, designation as a landmark does not require property owners to undergo rehabilitation projects or to restore previously removed or significantly altered elements. In reviewing exterior changes to landmarked properties, the Buffalo Preservation Board uses the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation to review projects. The Standards for Rehabilitation provide a list of ten guiding principles that should be met when rehabilitating an historic property for new and/or continued use. Essentially the Standards for Rehabilitation encourage the retention and repair of the character defining features of a property, while also allowing for necessary upgrades to ensure it will be safe and comfortable for its current inhabitants.

## **What kind of changes can I make to my property in a local historic district?**

The quick answer is that the Preservation Board issues certificates for work where the plans for construction, alteration, removal, or demolition conform to the provisions of this code and to design guidelines adopted in accordance with this code. The Preservation Board also has the power to modify adherence to the standards depending on the details of your property and proposed work to be completed.

## **Would I need a certificate from the Preservation Board to make ordinary repairs and do maintenance on my home?**

If the proposed work is a small repair or an in-kind replacement, a staff-level review may be possible. Staff is often able to provide a same-day approval. If the work is not in-kind or is a large rehabilitation project, it will require a review by the Preservation Board. The Board generally meets every two weeks. An application must be submitted at least eight days prior to an upcoming meeting. The application instructions cover the information that must be submitted for review including photos, drawings, plans and other requested information. The project will be scheduled for review at a Preservation Board meeting once a complete application is received. Repainting your home requires no approval process at all.

## **What kinds of changes to my property likely wouldn't be approved?**

There is no blanket answer to this question. Whether or not your project will get approved by the Buffalo Preservation Board depends on a variety of factors including the architectural integrity of your building, the specifics of your proposed project, and how successfully that project follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. As long as you follow the basic ideas of the Standards for Rehabilitation, which is to retain and repair character defining features and if replacements are needed then they need to be as in-kind as possible. In-kind replacements are replacement materials or items which match the old in material, design, color, and texture.

## **What about the interior of my home? Will my kitchen, bathroom, basement, etc. be subject to preservation standards?**

No. The Buffalo Preservation Board only has purview over exterior changes to a landmarked property. While the Preservation Board will not review your interior work, you may still need to obtain permits for that work. Keep in mind that as Elmwood is already listed in the National Register of Historic Places (as Elmwood (west) Historic District and Elmwood (east) Historic District), and as such property owners already have access to homeowner and commercial/income producing historic tax credits, credits you can use toward interior and exterior work. You can find more information by visiting <https://parks.ny.gov/shpo/tax-credit-programs/> or by contacting Preservation Buffalo Niagara.

## **Would landmark designation prevent all alterations and new construction?**

No. Designation as a landmark does not prevent owners from making changes to their property, nor does it require them to make alterations or repairs. Designation provides the community a level of protection by requiring the Preservation Board review of all alterations, additions, and demolitions so that they are in keeping with the historic character of the individual landmark or of the historic district in general.

## FINANCES

### **Would landmark designation raise my taxes?**

No. Being a landmarked property (either individually landmarked or as part of an historic district) does not change the method municipalities use to calculate property taxes. Property taxes are tied to real estate values and properties in historic districts are taxed no differently than those outside of a district.

### **Would a landmark designation lower my property value?**

Decades worth of studies, from here in New York State and across the country, have shown that local level landmarking, particularly the designation of LHDs, not only stabilize property values but support a steady increase in values over time. This is due to the required review on exterior changes, which provide the community a level of protection and participation towards preventing changes to the built environment which might be detrimental to property values. On the contrary, landmarking tends to raise property values because people want to live in neighborhoods protected from radical demolition and development.

### **Is there any financial assistance for owners within a historic district?**

As Elmwood is already listed in the National Register of Historic Places (as Elmwood (west) Historic District and Elmwood (east) Historic District), property owners already have access to homeowner and commercial/income producing historic tax credits. You can find more information by visiting <https://parks.ny.gov/shpo/tax-credit-programs/> or by contacting Preservation Buffalo Niagara.

### **Will it cost me more to make alterations to my property after it's landmarked?**

Not necessarily. There is no blanket answer to this question. How much your home improvement project costs depends on the current condition, materials, and design of your property and your desired outcome. If your building is in good shape and you are just looking to do regular repairs or upgrades, there should not be a big difference in cost. But if your building needs significant repairs or upgrades then you will likely see higher project costs.

## LEARNING MORE

### **How can I learn more? What if I have additional questions?**

For more information you can visit [LandmarkEV.org](http://LandmarkEV.org) or contact [ElmwoodLHD@gmail.com](mailto:ElmwoodLHD@gmail.com) for more information.