

QUESTIONS REGARDING HISTORIC DISTRICTS

What is a Historic District?

A Historic District is an area of the City that has been identified as having historic or architectural character that contributes to the City's history. Buildings and structures within a Historic District are subject to the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance, Chapter 17.32 of the City Code.

The designation of a Historic District is based upon an Architectural Survey of the area. For the survey, each individual property within the proposed district has been assessed and rated based on architectural significance. (This information is included in the nomination form and can be viewed on the City's website: www.stcharlesil.gov/projects/historic-district)

If my property is within a Historic District, what is required?

Any exterior changes to properties within a Historic District must meet review criteria before a building permit is issued. The intent of the review criteria is to encourage the preservation of buildings and architectural features that contribute to the historic character of the area.

The approval is called a "COA" (Certificate of Appropriateness). A COA is required for any exterior project that normally requires a building permit, including changes to windows, doors or siding; new buildings or additions; and building demolition. (Painting and most maintenance work does not require a building permit and therefore no COA is required.)

What is the process for having a project reviewed?

Projects that require a COA are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission, a group of citizens appointed by the Mayor and City Council. The Commission meets twice a month.

To request a review, you can either submit a normal building permit application or contact the City and ask to be added to the next Commission meeting agenda.

The Commission reviews each project against criteria in the ordinance, which include:

1. Significance of a Site, Structure or Building (as rated in the Architectural Survey)
2. General Architectural and Aesthetic Guidelines
3. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation
4. Advisory Design Guidelines prepared by the Commission

Additional documentation about your project may be requested, but there are no additional fees or forms. In most cases, a COA can be obtained within the same time frame as a building permit. This is usually two to three weeks, depending on the nature of the proposed work.

Property owners are encouraged to consult with the Commission during the planning stages of a project to determine if their proposal meets the applicable guidelines.

The review process is outlined in further detail in Section 17.32.080 of the City Code.

Are there rules against certain building materials?

No- Decisions on the use of materials in the Historic District are made on a case-by-case basis. The Commission assesses each proposal against the review standards. Factors considered include:

- The rating of the building in the Architectural Survey.
- The existing building materials and their condition.
- Whether materials are original to the building and whether they can be preserved.
- The conditions in the neighborhood, including the materials on nearby buildings.
- The details of the proposed materials including size, texture, finishing, installation, etc.

Do I need a COA for changes to a non-historic building?

Yes- Changes to non-historic buildings are evaluated to determine if there will be any detrimental impact on adjacent properties. Changes should be compatible with and maintain the existing contemporary style. The Historic Commission is required to apply the “maximum flexibility” allowed by the ordinance in its review of changes for buildings that have little historic or architectural significance.

Can I add to my existing historic building?

Yes- Additions can be made to historic buildings if they are compatible with the architectural character of the original building, and meet all zoning requirements such as building lot coverage and setbacks.

Am I required to restore my building or make it look old?

No- The Historic District does not require you to restore your building or to make improvements when you don't have any plans to do so. If you decide to improve your property or carry out repairs, the ordinance requires the project to be consistent with the overall architectural character of the building and the district as a whole.

Will the Historic District limit how I use my property?

No- Existing zoning laws set limits on how a property can be used. The Historic District only regulates the exterior of buildings and structures, not the use of the property or interior of the building.

My property is already a designated landmark. Will the Historic District affect my property?

No- A number of properties within the proposed Historic District boundaries are already designated as Landmarks by the City. These properties have plaques that read “Designated Landmark” with a City of St. Charles logo. These properties are already subject to the Historic Preservation requirements, and the Historic District designation will have no additional impact.

A number of properties in the area have other types of plaques indicating a year of construction or other information. These buildings are likely not official City landmarks. If you have a question on a specific property, contact the Planning Division at (630) 377-4443.

What are the benefits of being in a Historic District?

- The Historic Preservation Commission is available to assist property owners to find resources on structural restoration and rehabilitation. In addition, the Commission will review and make informal recommendations on any proposed construction projects.
- A Historic District helps ensure that changes to properties are appropriate for the building and neighborhood and do not diminish the architectural or historical significance of a building or other structure.
- Residential properties in a Historic District may qualify for a property tax assessment freeze through a state program. Commercial properties may qualify for a tax credit through federal programs.
- Historic Districts support neighborhood stability by encouraging up-keep and maintenance of significant and contributing sites and structures. Designation promotes pride in the community and encourages residents and visitors to view the City's past as a valuable resource.