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Lewiston Historic Preservation

Frequently Asked Questions

Preservation

What constitutes an historic district? How is one designated?

A Historic District is an area that has significance to the City in one or more of four areas:

1. It has historical, cultural or educational importance.
2. It has architectural or engineering importance.
3. It has geographic importance
4. It has archaeological importance.

A historic district is designated by the City Council after recommendation from the Historic Preservation Commission. Prior to making such a recommendation to the Council, the Commission must prepare a report outlining the significance of the district, including a map with the boundaries of the district, and an inventory of each property. Once the report has been prepared, the Commission must hold a public hearing and notify all property owners that will be included in the district. Notice in the newspaper is also required. The Commission typically holds information work sessions prior to the hearing to answer questions regarding the proposed designation.

After the public hearing is held by the Commission, their final recommendation is submitted to the City Council for action at its own public hearing.

Who is the Historic Preservation Commission and what is their authority?

The Lewiston Historic Preservation Commission was created by the City Council in 1975 to promote, preserve and protect historic buildings, sites, neighborhoods etc. within the city limits. There are up to nine members from the community

who serve on the Commission, as appointed by the Mayor with the consent of the City Council. Members of the commission may include persons with backgrounds or interests in the fields of history, architecture, urban planning, archaeology, and law, or any of the foregoing and property owners or representatives of property owners or representatives of property owners and of the general public. Chapter 19.5, Article II Lewiston City Code sets forth the powers and duties of the Commission in order to allow them to “engage in the comprehensive program of historic preservation...” [Duties of the Commission include:

- 1. Conducting surveys of local historic properties and landmarks.
- 2. Recommending ordinances and otherwise provide information for the purposes of historic preservation.
- 3. Cooperation with the Federal, State, and Local Governments in the pursuit of the objectives of historic preservation.
- 4. Conducting an educational and interpretive program on historic properties within the jurisdiction of the City.]

The Historic Preservation Commission reviews applications for changes to the exterior of a property or site located within those districts – interiors are not within the authority of the Historic Preservation Commission.

If my house is in a local historic district, does that mean I can never change it?

No. Being located within a historic district does NOT mean one cannot make changes to the property: it simply requires review and approval by the Historic Preservation Commission first. If a property owner wishes to make changes to a property in a local historic district, an application is made through Planning & Development Services. The application is reviewed by staff, and a report with recommendations is presented to the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission then rules on whether the proposed changes are compatible with the historic nature of the building and/or district.

These staff recommendations and the Commission’s decisions are made based on existing city guidelines and ordinances. The Historic Preservation Commission reviews requests for changes based on these guides and with emphasis on

maintaining the historic character and quality of a property. Sometimes that might mean that significant changes can take place, other it might mean that the Commission denies what a property owner considers to be a fairly minor request. In general though, Staff and the Commission try to work with property owners to find a solution that is reasonable and acceptable to everyone.

What is involved in the approval process?

Property owners must receive a "Certificate of Appropriateness" before they proceed with any changes to the exterior of their properties. There are two types of approval procedures for requesting Certificates of Appropriateness: Staff level and Commission level. Both require the submittal of an application form and fee. Minor changes are typically handled at the Staff level, while more substantial changes must be reviewed and approved by the Commission. The decision regarding how the application will be processed is determined by the Planning Division. The Commission hears requests for Certificates at a public hearing once a month. Schedules of these dates, applications, and other information are available from the Planning Division.

Will the Commission review interior changes to my house?

No. The Lewiston Historic Preservation Commission reviews applications for changes to the exterior of a property or site located within historic districts. Interiors are not within their authority.

What if I disagree with a decision made by the Historic Preservation Commission?

Any decision of the Commission may be appealed to the Lewiston City Council in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Ordinance.

Why are vacant lots, non-historic buildings or parking lots sometimes included in an historic district?

The commission is interested in preserving the aesthetics of an entire area and not just the buildings. If these properties are not included in the district, there is a greater chance that changes on these lots could have a negative impact on the area or adjoining buildings. For instance, if a modern, unsympathetic structure were to be constructed on a vacant lot located between two historic homes.

What if I object to being included in the district?

The Commission hopes to have the support of all the property owners, however you may voice your objection at the work session and public hearings before the Historic Preservation Commission and the City Council. The Commission and City Council will consider all public testimony before rendering a decision.

Where can I get more information about the Lewiston Historic Preservation Commission and Historic Districts?

The Historic Preservation program is part of the City's Planning & Development Services Department. Call (208) 746-1318 for more information.

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