

# Historic District Fact Sheet

UTAH STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



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Preservation Office**

## What is a historic district?

- An area or neighborhood that has a concentration of historic buildings (typically 50 years or older) which retain their architectural integrity and represent an important aspect of the city's history (periods of growth, historic architectural styles, etc.).
- There are two levels of historic districts--local register and National Register of Historic Places. A district may be listed on either the National or local registers or both.

## What is required for designating a historic district?

- "Reconnaissance level survey" (RLS) documentation is required for all proposed districts. This involves photographing and mapping all buildings in the district, recording their basic characteristics (such as style, materials, plan, and estimated age), and assessing whether or not they contribute to the historic character of the district. This information is all entered in our database. Professional architectural historians must conduct these surveys.
- Historical research is recommended, but not required, for each of the "contributing" buildings in the district. We recommend following our Intensive Level Survey" (ILS) guidelines, which require completion of the state historic site form. If it is impractical to research all of the contributing buildings, then at least a reasonable sample of buildings in the district should be researched. The sample should include buildings that represent the various periods of construction, architectural styles, and historic themes embodied by the district.
- An historical overview of the entire district is also needed. This should be based on the architectural survey of the district (RLS), the individual house histories (ILS) and other local history information. The purpose of the overview is twofold: (1) to provide a basic background history of the area; and (2) to justify the significance of the district. You must prove that this neighborhood is a significant representative of the community's past in order to qualify it for listing on the National Register. For National Register districts, you must complete the National Register form. We recommend the same form or something similar for local register districts.
- A map of the district should be provided. The map should show the boundaries of the district and address of each building in the district, with the contributing buildings shaded in or somehow distinguished from the non-contributing buildings. The reconnaissance survey will generate this type of map. Having the map completed early in the process will often help in determining district boundaries, since you can see at a glance where the concentrations of contributing buildings are.

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## What are the implications of historic district designation?

- National Register--One of the primary benefits of National Register designation is simply the increase of neighborhood pride. There may also be financial benefits. Foremost is the 20 percent state tax credit for owners who rehabilitate residential buildings. Rehabilitation costs must exceed \$10,000 and all work must be approved in advance by the State Historic Preservation Office. Twenty percent of the rehab costs can be taken as a tax credit applied to the building owner's state income taxes. For example, a building owner who spends \$20,000 on a historic house rehab could claim a \$4,000 tax credit.

Contrary to popular belief, there are no restrictions that come with National Register listing. Property owners retain all of their rights to alter, preserve or demolish their buildings as they see fit. Developers are not prohibited by National Register designation either. The only restrictions and controls in a historic district are those imposed by the city, which is a completely separate designation and process.

- Local Register--Most smaller cities have few if any restrictions or regulations regarding their historic districts. Some cities (Salt Lake, Ogden, Provo and Park City for example) require pre-approval by their historic preservation commissions (landmark committees) of changes made to the exterior of any buildings in the district. They often have printed design guidelines to help building owners understand in advance what types of exterior work are approvable. These cities may also have the power to delay or even prevent the demolition of historic properties.

Sites designated to a local register can be given more leniency in complying with certain building code requirements and can often qualify more easily for conditional use permits. Contact your city planning department to find out the details regarding your city register.

- In summary, historic district designation is usually a positive step for an area. It tends to help stabilize a neighborhood, stimulate increased owner-occupancy by making it a more distinct and desirable place to live, and generate increased property values as buildings are rehabilitated through use of historic preservation tax credits. These beneficial effects vary, of course, depending on the area and the economy at the time. Overall, however, historic district designation has produced positive results both in Utah and throughout the country.

### Additional Information

Cory Jensen

National Register Coordinator/Deputy SHPO

Utah State Historic Preservation Office

coryjensen@utah.gov

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