

## National Register Historic District / Local Historic District: There is a Difference

“A National Register District Identifies; A Local District Protects”

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### National Register District

A **National Register** historic district is a historic district that is listed in the **National Register of Historic Places**. The National Register is our country’s official list of historic places worthy of preservation. It includes individual buildings, structures, sites, and objects as well as historic districts that are historically, architecturally, or archaeologically significant.

National Register listing **recognizes** the significance of properties and districts. By doing so, it **identifies** significant historic resources in a community. Boundaries of National Register districts are tightly drawn to encompass only concentrated areas of historic buildings. Information compiled to nominate a historic district can be used in a variety planning and development activities. National Register listing also makes available specific preservation incentives and provides a limited degree of protection from the effects of federally funded, licensed, or permitted activities.

The National Register is maintained by the U.S. Department of the Interior. In Georgia, the National Register program is administered by the Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Natural Resources. Districts and other properties are listed in the National Register through a 17-step process that involves **identification, documentation, and evaluation**. National Register historic districts most commonly encompass central business districts, residential neighborhoods, industrial areas, rural areas, and occasionally, entire communities.

### Local Historic District

A **local** historic district is a district designated by local ordinance and falls under the jurisdiction of a **local preservation review commission**. A local historic district is generally “overlaid” on existing zoning classifications in a community; therefore, a local district commission deals only with the appearance of the district, not with the uses to which properties in the district are put.

According to the 1980 Georgia Historic Preservation Act which makes such local designations possible, a local historic district is a “geographically definable area, urban or rural, which contains structures, sites, and/or works of art which have special historical or aesthetic interest or value; represent one or more periods or styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of the municipality, county, state, or region; and cause that area to constitute a visibly perceptible section of the community.

The designation of a local district **protects** the significant properties and historic character of the district. It provides communities with means to make sure that growth, development, and change takes place in ways that respect important architectural, historical and environmental characteristics. Local designation encourages sensitive development in the district and discourages unsympathetic changes from occurring. This happens through a process called **design review**, whereby the preservation commission approves major changes that are planned for the district and issues Certificates of Appropriateness which allow the proposed changes to take place.

## **National Register District**

Identifies significant properties and districts for general planning purposes.

Analyzes and assesses the historic character and quality of the district.

Designates historic areas based on uniform national criteria and procedures.

Sets district boundaries tightly, based on the actual distribution pattern of intact historic properties in the area.

Makes available specific federal tax incentives for preservation purposes.

Provides a limited degree of protection from the effects of federally assisted undertakings.

Qualifies property owners for federal and state grants for preservation purposes, when funds are available.

Does not restrict the use or disposition of property or obligate private property owners in any way.

Does not require conformance to design guidelines or preservation standards when property is rehabilitated unless specific preservation incentives (tax credits, grants) are involved.

Does not affect state and local government activities.

Does not prevent the demolition of historic buildings and structures within designated areas.

## **Local Historic District**

Protects a community's historic properties and areas through a design review process.

Protects the historic character and quality of the district with specific design controls.

Designates historic areas on the basis of local criteria and local procedures.

Sets district boundaries based on the distribution pattern of historic resources plus other preservation and community planning considerations.

Provides no tax incentives for preservation purposes unless such are provided by tax law.

Provides no additional protection from the effects of federally assisted undertakings.

Does not qualify property owners for federal or state grants for preservation purposes.

Does not restrict the use to which property is put in the district or require property owners to make improvements to their property.

Requires local commission review and approval, based on conformance to local design guidelines, before building permit is issued to any "material changes" in appearance to the district.

Does not affect federal, state, or local government activities.

Provides for review of proposed demolitions within designated areas; may prevent or delay proposed demolitions for specific time periods to allow for preservation alternatives.

## **Districts in Context**

National Register and locally designated historic districts can be used independently or together to help preserve a community's historic resources. For example, the National Register program might be used as a convenient and credible way to identify a community's historic resources, followed by a local district designation which would further protect and enhance those historic resources. Conversely, a local survey done to establish a local historic district might also be used as the basis for a National Register district, which would afford additional preservation incentives, including rehabilitation tax credits, to properties protected in the local district. Local district designation might be used to protect, selectively, portions of National Register districts considered especially significant to a community or subject to particularly strong development pressures. Local designation also might be afforded to an area larger than a National Register district to provide an even greater degree of protection to the historic resources within the National Register district.

Some community's preservation needs may be met entirely with either a locally designated district or a National Register district; there are many examples in Georgia of both situations. Other communities may believe that package deal involving both types of districts works best. The point to remember is that local districts and National Register districts are different, but complementary, and can work effectively by themselves or together in meeting a community's historic preservation needs.