

Conservation District Information

Definition:

A Conservation District is a zoning or preservation tool used to help communities protect certain characteristics in their neighborhood. They concentrate on protecting such things as architecture styles, densities of the area, heights of structures, and setback guidelines. Scope and size may vary. Regulations may affect design elements, structure size, building demolition, and land use.

Neighborhood conservation districts are areas:

- with a distinct physical character
- that have a goal of preservation or conservation, but
- may or may not merit designation as a historic district

Neighborhood conservation districts are implemented:

- through zoning overlay or independent zoning district
- to protect character-defining streetscapes in older areas
- often to prevent teardowns & incompatible alteration or new construction

Conservation District programs can be divided into two categories: "historic district-lite" and zoning land use.

- design guidelines often written by neighborhood organization
- standards and guidelines often similar to but more lenient than "historic district-type standards"

Process: Steps 1 & 2= Identification. Steps 3-4 Historic Resource Listing either to Local or National registries

*****Follow LDC directions 8.5.7 for HPC designations**

Follow Criteria for Historic Significance: Age, Significance, Historic Contexts and themes for buildings, historic districts, objects, sites, and structures. (SHPO)

1. Conduct Survey: (using prescribed format)
2. Inventory: Enter into inventory (further action is optional)
3. Evaluate for Eligible Properties: Evaluate for significance and integrity using adopted criteria
4. Nomination: Determine if designation is merited, considering survey findings and other goals and objectives
 - Local Designation?
 - National Register?

Steps to Designation from SHPO:

1. Prepare the nomination
2. File the nomination with the HPC
3. Schedule a HPC hearing
4. Preservation Commission makes a decision
5. Referral to Planning Commission
6. City Council hearing/ 7. Appeal

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Pros:

Offers residents a useful tool to protect older, established neighborhoods that:

- have a distinctive or cohesive character, but fail to qualify for historic district designation
- lack sufficient support for designation, but desire protection from tear downs, incompatible development

More flexible in nature because they can be crafted as suits the area.

May have lower-level governance

Encourages neighborhood initial and on-going involvement

Allows for variety within a town by district.

Increases neighborhood pride.

Protects neighborhood from encroachment of non-conforming structures, etc.

Conserves architecture and feeling of a neighborhood with compatible development.

Can increase property values.

Other Pros equal to general historic designation.

Cons:

- preservation of historic fabric often not mandatory
- may place design-based decision making with official or committees that lack the necessary qualifications to make informed decisions
- could undermine existing historic preservation programs if conservation district supplants rather than augments historic districts
- often requires high level of neighborhood support and involvement
- people don't know what conservation districts are, and they are not easy to explain. People do understand Historic Districts.

HPC or neighborhood need to establish, publish, and explain guidelines.

Check regulations for percentage needed for approval for district and how to tabulate.

Not so easy to get pre-approval or to notice when it has been done—neighbors policing neighbors?

Some repairs/restorations may be more costly to owner.

Other Cons specific to historic preservation.

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What we currently have:

None.

Comparable Cities:

Edina proposed "Voluntary Neighborhood Conservation Districts where groups of adjoining homeowners could have the option to create their own Neighborhood Conservation Districts which could further guide construction activity.

35 states have Conservation District legislation

65 districts identified in U. of M. Study

Many sample guidelines exist.

Iowa City has good flow chart for Historic District and Conservation District

Some information from study by Dr. Greg Donorfrio, U. of M.

Near us:

Red Wing (similar to us) has 2 Historic Districts (one is just the St. James block) and 2 Conservation Districts of homes.

Stillwater has one historic district and one huge Conservation District broken down into 14 historic Neighborhoods.

Stillwater has guidelines online. They also have their complete survey online.

Red Wing has style guides, but no real regulations online.

***As we progress it would be good to interview a few City Planner or HPC chairs about how things work in Red Wing or Stillwater. Each of those towns have similar city administrations to ours. St. Cloud has more districts, but also more City Planners and more money from the state that they share with their HPC.