

City of Lake City

South Oak Street Historic District

Questions and Answers

What is happening?

Lake City's Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) would like to create a locally designated historic district along a 5 block stretch of South Oak Street between West Center Street and Lakewood Avenue, including a small stretch of Marion Street.

Historic districts exist in many nearby communities, including Red Wing, Old Frontenac, Wabasha, and Winona. The HPC believes the creation of a historic district is one of the best tools it has to protect the history and character one of the City's most beautiful neighborhoods.

What is the Heritage Preservation Commission?

The City Council established the HPC to recognize, protect, and enhance the City's heritage. The HPC has seven voting members appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council. The powers of the HPC are found in Chapter 153 of the Lake City Code of Ordinances.

What is a Local Historic District and why do cities create them?

A local historic district is a geographically defined area with a concentration of historic and significant buildings unified by past events, physical development or design. The HPC can recommend to the City Council that a historic district be designated as a historic preservation site. Cities around the country have created historic districts to protect historic properties, preserve the historic integrity of neighborhoods, encourage investment in older areas, stabilize property values, foster neighborhood identification and pride, and enhance tourism.

How is a local historic district established?

A formal process is outlined in the City Code, which details the designation process. There are several required steps in the designation process, including a public hearing held by the HPC, review by the Planning Commission, and official action on an ordinance by the City Council.

What process would I follow if I wanted to make exterior changes?

A property owner within the district would apply for a site alteration permit if they plan any of the following: (1) Remodeling, altering or repairing, including paint color that will change the exterior appearance of a building or a site. (2) New construction (3) Moving of a building (4) Demolition in whole or in part. A site alteration permit is not required for interior alterations. The HPC would approve the permit if the proposed work preserves the structure's historic character based on design guidelines which will identify the key architectural features of the district's historic homes.

Are all buildings in a district necessarily historic?

No. Historic districts often include non-historic (non-contributing) properties. Proposed changes to the exteriors of a non-contributing property will also require a site alteration permit. The alterations should enhance the integrity of the entire district.

Will I have to fix up my building or make it look more historic?

No. Property owners within a historic district are not required to alter their homes.

What are the advantages of a local historic district?

For homeowners within a district, there are several benefits. First, historic districts protect the historic character of neighboring homes and therefore can provide investment protection for property owners. Second, owners have some security in knowing that alterations made by their neighbors within the district will be sensitive to the existing character of the neighborhood. Thirdly, historic districts tend to be attractive to buyers because buying real estate within a historic district is often believed to be a secure investment.

What are the disadvantages of a local historic district?

Projects may take longer in the planning phase. Homeowners within the district will need to familiarize themselves with the design review process and obtain a site alteration permit prior to the issuance of a building permit. The HPC allows City staff to quickly approve minor work and larger projects would be reviewed by the HPC at their monthly meetings.

Will inclusion in a historic district restrict how I can use my property?

No. A designation cannot override the use standards established in the City's Zoning Ordinance.

Is building demolition and/or new construction allowed?

Yes to both. A building in a historic district may be demolished if the HPC approves. The decision would be based on the existing condition and reuse options for the building. New construction would need to be compatible with the existing designs in the district. New buildings do not have to be imitations of historic ones.

Will this have an impact on my taxes?

Inclusion in the district will not directly affect property taxes. However, property values within historic districts often increase relative to similar properties outside the district.

Who do I contact with questions?

Through a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society, the City has hired Greg Gaut, a historic preservation consultant from Winona, to research the homes in the proposed district and prepare the nomination. He can be reached at 507-279-7859.