

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Historic District? What's the difference between State & Fed designations and City designations?

Old & Historic is a zoning overlay designation that is administered by the city and hence offers the protection that comes with that particular zoning overlay that includes provisions that any exterior change, demolition, or new construction must be reviewed and approved by the CAR before a permit can be approved. The other two designations (Fed & State) have no regulatory components unless there is the need for a federal license or federal funds are used in the undertaking.

Are there other historic districts in Richmond, and if so, how did they get started?

In 1957, the St. John's Church Old & Historic District was created by Richmond City Council in response to citizen appeals to help preserve the historic character of the Church Hill area. The Commission of Architectural Review was established to administer and protect the area, and since that time 13 additional districts and numerous individual historic sites have been added to the Commission's jurisdiction for a total of approximately 2,600 properties.

I've heard that having a historic district will increase my taxes. Is that true?

No. Property taxes will not go up as a result of becoming a historic district. Currently, our area is being taxed at the same rate that St. John's & Chimborazo Old and Historic Districts are being taxed.

Will I have to spend a lot of money fixing up or changing my property to fit with the historic district guidelines?

No. No one has to make changes to their properties when the area goes historic. Current paint colors and structures are considered "grandfathered," meaning that what existed before the historic district designation can remain the same. Only when you decide to change the color or exterior structure of your home do you need to get approval from the Commission of Architectural Review, who oversees enforcement of historic guidelines. In addition, there is a wide variety of approved colors to choose from when painting your home.

In-fill: what kind of structures can be build on empty lots in a historic district?

In-fill construction needs to be contemporary, yet compatible with the surrounding structures. New buildings must respect the prevailing setback patterns of the block face. Scale and mass are also of great concern, new buildings must maintain the existing human scale of its surroundings.

Basically, an in-fill structure should follow the existing patterns in the block but express them in a contemporary language

How long can a property stay vacant/condemned in a historic district?

CAR has no jurisdiction over condemnations, and even demolitions that are required for safety purposes are handled under the Commissioner of Buildings. However, buildings tend to not stay neglected in historically designated areas because of the perceived value of property there.

How is Section 8 housing affected in a historic district?

If it is a new housing or if it requires exterior alterations to an existing structure, it needs to be reviewed by CAR. Other than that, the designation does not affect use.

Why is a historic district so important & why should I get involved? As stated previously, historic districts keep development in check which is good for current inhabitants and keeps the character/fabric of the neighborhood intact. Church Hill is one of the few existing neighborhoods in the United States with a high concentration of antebellum and 18th century architecture. It is important to preserve these structures and for new development to compliment, not clash with it's surroundings. Participation in this effort is key as a majority of property owners in a proposed area must agree to the designation for its success.

How do I find out more about historic districts? In the near future, you will be mailed a notice for a public information meeting. City staff will make a presentation on the process for designating an Old & Historic District. A Commission of Architectural Review staff member will answer questions from those in attendance. You can also contact CAR using the info below.

How can I get involved and support this initiative? Easy! There's already over 30 neighbors involved now. We have met several times and will meet again in the near future. If you live within the boundaries shown in this brochure, or you already live in a historic district in Church Hill and want to help out, see Laura Daab's contact info below.

City Contact

Commission of Architectural Review
646-6335

www.ci.richmond.va.us/departments/communityDev/car.aspx

Church Hill North Contact

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