

• FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS •

Prepared by the Near West Side Historic Designation Committee 2-28-19; updated 4-26-19

Watch for additional FAQs at www.HistoricNWS.org and future meetings!

· What is the purpose of this series of community meetings?

The Near West Side Historic Designation Committee is a group of individual homeowners who are exploring the concept of Local Designation for our neighborhood as a Conservation or Full Historic District. There is no application in place for this. We are learning what designation – a step that 12 other Bloomington neighborhoods already have taken – would mean for the Near West Side. We have asked for these meetings to share what we are learning and gauge what level of support there is among our neighbors for designation. Over the next four months, we have three Public Meetings scheduled to present information gathered from knowledgeable specialists. If more meetings are needed, we will add them. This is part of an extended, exploratory phase that will continue at least into the summer.

· How and when will neighborhood property owners register their preferences “for” or “against” local designation?

During the current phase of Public Meetings, we continually will be gathering feedback from the neighborhood. Then, before any application is submitted, we will collect and record property owner's preferences "for" or "against" local designation and, if "for," for which type (Full Historic or Conservation). You won't find mention of a vote in the City's published Designation Timeline because voting is not a part of the process prescribed by Indiana state law. However, in response to community feedback, our committee will find a fair and accurate means of recording preferences and evaluating the level of support that exists for seeking designation. Whether this process will be accomplished by ballot, petition, or some other method has yet to be determined; all methods have their pros and cons.

· What is the difference between a Conservation District and a Full Historic District?

Both types of districts require property owners to seek approval by the City's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) for demolition, moving a structure, or new construction. For both types, the HPC relies upon Design Guidelines created specifically by and for the district in which the property is located. (See also “What Are Design Guidelines,” below.)

Full Historic districts also require approval for any work that may alter the appearance of a structure from the public right-of-way, to protect the integrity of both the district and the structure. Another difference is that after 3 years, property owners in Conservation districts vote as to whether to retain that status or elevate to Full Historic

status. Indiana law stipulates that 51% must vote to retain; otherwise, the status moves to Full Historic.

· *What can Historic Districting do for a neighborhood that zoning laws can't?*

Zoning is general: it does not protect a neighborhood's special character, such as its historical character. Where that can be demonstrated to exist, Historic Districting supplements zoning laws by encouraging compatible change that respects the neighborhood's past and discourages random change that does not.

· *What is Demolition Delay? Does it apply to designated local historic districts?*

Bloomington's Demolition Delay Ordinance, adopted in 2005, puts a hold of up to 90 days on the full, substantial, or partial demolition of documented historic structures. These are structures that have been listed as "Outstanding," "Notable," or "Contributing" in the City's Historic Sites and Structures Inventory, and structures that were added in the 2015 State Historic Architectural and Archaeological Research Database (SHAARD) survey as "Contributing." (The SHAARD survey is conducted and updated about every 10 years.) The 90-day delay period allows the City's Historic Preservation Commission and the City Council to consider implementing formal historic preservation actions before these structures are demolished. Once the HPC reviews the demolition delay at one of their semi-monthly meetings, the decision is made to either release the demolition delay or to start the process of local historic designation.

Demolition Delay does not apply to structures or neighborhoods that have been designated as locally historic (including structures within the boundaries of both Full Historic and Conservation districts). In these cases, other procedures exist for approval of a structure's demolition.

· *What are Design Guidelines? Who writes them, and when?*

Design Guidelines are a document that establishes a district's chosen standards for maintaining the historic character of its façades. Interiors are not included in Design Guidelines because changes not viewable from the public right-of-way are not subject to review by the HPC. The Guidelines vary considerably from district to district, ranging from strict regulation to lenient. This is because the scope of activities subject to review by the HPC depends on the language of the Design Guidelines, which are written by a neighborhood committee. If our neighborhood chooses to apply for designation and receives it, please join the Guidelines Committee!

· *What's historic about the Near West Side?*

Over the past few decades, historians have adopted a broader, more inclusive view of history than the former "Great Man" approach. In keeping with this new thinking,

architectural historians have become increasingly aware of the importance of diverse, working-class neighborhoods like ours. Watch the CATS video of our April 26 Public Meeting on our website to learn more about what makes the Near West Side historic!

4-26-19 update. The questions below have been received since our 1st Public Meeting.

· Can Local Designation protect against, or even prevent, zoning changes a City government might decide to make?

Local designation cannot stop a City from making zoning changes, but the Design Guidelines that locally designated neighborhoods draw up continue to be legally binding after rezoning. The Guidelines thus establish and serve as a constant set of developmental standards, unique to each district, that won't change with rezoning. This is true in Conservation Districts as well as in Full Historic Districts. (See also "What is the difference between a Conservation District and a Full Historic District" and "What are Design Guidelines," pp. 1 and 2, respectively.)

· How long can a homeowner living in a designated historic district expect the Design Review process to take?

The design review process can take anywhere from 1–4 weeks depending on the extent and nature of the proposed changes to the home. The vast majority of petitioners—about 90%—receive approval within 2 weeks. The remaining 10% are either denied, or asked to return with additional information or changes to their application. In this situation, the review process is lengthened by at least 2 weeks.

· I understand that the Near West Side is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. How is Local Historic Designation different from National Register Designation?

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of our country's historic buildings, districts, sites, and structures, and objects worthy of preservation. It was established as part of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is overseen by the National Park Service. The National Register of Historic Places does not create design guidelines for the neighborhoods and individual sites it designates; and there are no enforcement mechanisms from the National Register that are used on the local level. National Register designation is a title, and while achieving it is a great honor, being a National Register District does not ultimately protect houses and neighborhoods.

By contrast, Local Historic Designation—either as a Conservation District or a Full Historic district—involves the creation of Design Guidelines specific to the neighborhood, by people who live there. Through the Guidelines and the review process regulated and enforced by City staff and the Bloomington Historic Preservation Commission, Local Designation protects houses and neighborhoods of historic and

cultural significance from being demolished or dramatically altered, that is, to a context that does not fit within the neighborhood or the structure itself.

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Come to our final Public Meeting on Friday, June 28, at 7 p.m. at Council Chambers!**