



THE CITY OF ERIE

JOSEPH V. SCHEMBER, MAYOR

Historic Overlay District Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a Historic Overlay Ordinance?

A: The purpose of the ordinance is to protect and preserve historical areas of the City of Erie and individual structures and sites within this area that are historically, architecturally or culturally significant. It is also intended to ensure that new development or redevelopment of lots within the Historic Overlay District is compatible with the character of the District.

Land use and building regulations are often delegated by States to municipalities in the form of enabling legislation – laws that allow (and sometimes require) to enact ordinances related to planning, zoning, and construction codes. In Pennsylvania there are two enabling laws that allow municipalities to enact historic preservation ordinances. The approach used by the City of Erie is informed by the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The MPC is the compilation of all of the planning and zoning authorities and requirements delegated to municipalities. Among these authorizations is the ability to classify properties “having unique historical, architectural or patriotic value” and to enact regulations for their protection and enhancement.

Q: Why is it important that the City of Erie designates Historic Overlay District(s) and landmarks?

A: As the adage goes – all preservation is local. While federal and state programs and policies are undeniably important, historic resources are most appreciated and hence preserved at the local level. And, while the restrictions of the Historic Overlay District Ordinance are primarily meant to protect our community’s heritage, help spur tourism, generate new investment in otherwise forgotten areas, and increase local tax revenue and property values, it will also protect homes and businesses against the devaluing effects of unsightly or inappropriate development on nearby properties.

Q: Which properties are you proposing be included in the Historic Overlay District(s)?

A: As a starting point, we are proposing that Historic Overlay Districts be created for the four National Register Districts located within the City of Erie. They include the West 6th Street Historic District, West 21st Street Historic District, and West Park Place. The City of Erie will also be conducting a citywide survey in the next couple years to identify other potential historic districts and landmarks.

Q: What types of actions will require review by the Historic Review Commission?

A: This law will protect historic properties within the designated District(s) through a permitting process known as the "Certificate of Appropriateness." This process requires advance review of proposed projects by the Historic Review Commission. Alterations, additions, rehabilitation, or reconstruction of a historic property within the District(s) and visible from a public right of way will trigger the review process. No permit will be required for interior work, exterior painting, or in-kind replacement of building materials.

The proposed ordinance also outlines the review process for issuance of demolition permits for historic properties within the District(s), and provides design guidelines for new construction so that new structures fit with the character of the District(s).

The Historic Review Commission consists of five voting members appointed by Mayor and two ex-officio members. The Committee will include individuals who have an interest in history, archeology or historic preservation, a City Planning Commission member, a City Building Code Enforcement Officer, a representative from the Erie County Historical Society, a representative from Preservation Erie.

The Historic Preservation Planner for the City of Erie will serve as one of the ex-officio members, along with a member of the Planning Commission. The Historic Preservation Planner will serve as a liaison to the Mayor, the City Council and the citizens of Erie on all things relating to historic preservation in the City.

Q: How will the ordinance protect historic properties within the District(s) from being demolished?

A: The ordinance authorizes demolition of historic properties only in cases where retention of the structure will cause an extreme burden on the property owner and the resource cannot be rehabilitated or sold or the property poses a safety threat after a fire or other type of natural disaster. Demolitions within a locally designated Historic Overlay District will undergo the Certificate of Appropriateness process.

Q: What does the application and review process look like?

A: Property owners will be required to submit complete applications to the Zoning Officer. Applications will include: (1) a written description of the proposed alteration, addition, reconstruction or rehabilitation; and, where applicable (2) a site plan at a scale designated by the Zoning Officer; (3) schematic architectural drawings of the proposed construction or alterations; (4) materials list and disposition of existing materials. Once an application is received, the Historic Review Commission has 30 days to meet and review the application, and 30 days following the meeting to provide a recommendation to the Zoning Officer. The Zoning Officer then responds accordingly.

Q: What standards of review will be used to guide the Historic District Committee's in making permit recommendations?

A: We propose creating a set of design guidelines for each locally designated Historic Overlay District to inform the Historic Review Commission in reviewing permit applications. These guidelines will be based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation and will explain the concepts of historic preservation and how these concepts may be applied and the importance of restoring and maintaining our historic architecture. Creating the design guidelines for each district will include consultation with owners and residents within those districts.

Q: Who do I contact for further information about the Historic Overlay District Zoning Ordinance, or the historic preservation program in the City of Erie.

A: The City of Erie has a full time Historic Preservation Planner to assist with all things related to historic preservation in Erie. You can reach Chris Kinder at ckinder@erie.pa.us, or (814)460-3096.