

PROTECTING HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS IN SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

Information about Local Historic Districts and Neighborhood Preservation Districts for residents, community groups, owners, businesses, developers, buyers and sellers.

Salem has an exceptional collection of historic neighborhoods, each with their own unique characteristics and stories. Incremental changes are part of the narrative of these neighborhoods, but sudden and wholesale changes threaten what makes these places special, welcoming, and appealing.

We want residents to be aware of two best-practices that exist for protecting special places.

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Local Historic Districts (LHD) are areas in which historic buildings and their settings are protected by public review. Salem's local ordinance is established by MA General Law Chapter 40C, which determines which building features require review. The intent is to protect distinctive characteristics of historically important areas and to ensure that change will be compatible with each building's existing features.

Salem currently has four Local Historic Districts: McIntire, Washington Square (Salem Common), Derby Street, and a portion of Lafayette Street. Salem's existing LHDs have been protecting parts of our city for decades, but they were created when the benefits of preservation weren't well appreciated and, as a result, many significant buildings are not included in adjacent districts or as stand-alone districts.

NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION DISTRICTS

Neighborhood Preservation Districts (NPD) can be established in areas where residents want to protect the character of a neighborhood. The district is generally made up of buildings with common physical characteristics that define the neighborhood's character.

During establishment of a NPD and as regulations are being drafted, residents and property owners are consulted to determine which defining elements should be protected. This will vary among different neighborhoods and could include review of new construction, additions, demolition, or selected major alterations. It could also define what is not included (for instance review of paint colors, siding type, or windows.)

NPDs were studied in Salem in 2009 and a draft ordinance was written, however, no NPDs currently exist. To establish a NPD, the study recommendations would need to be updated and adopted into city ordinance.



Gable roofs, bay windows and ornamental door canopies are defining features of these Boardman Street houses.

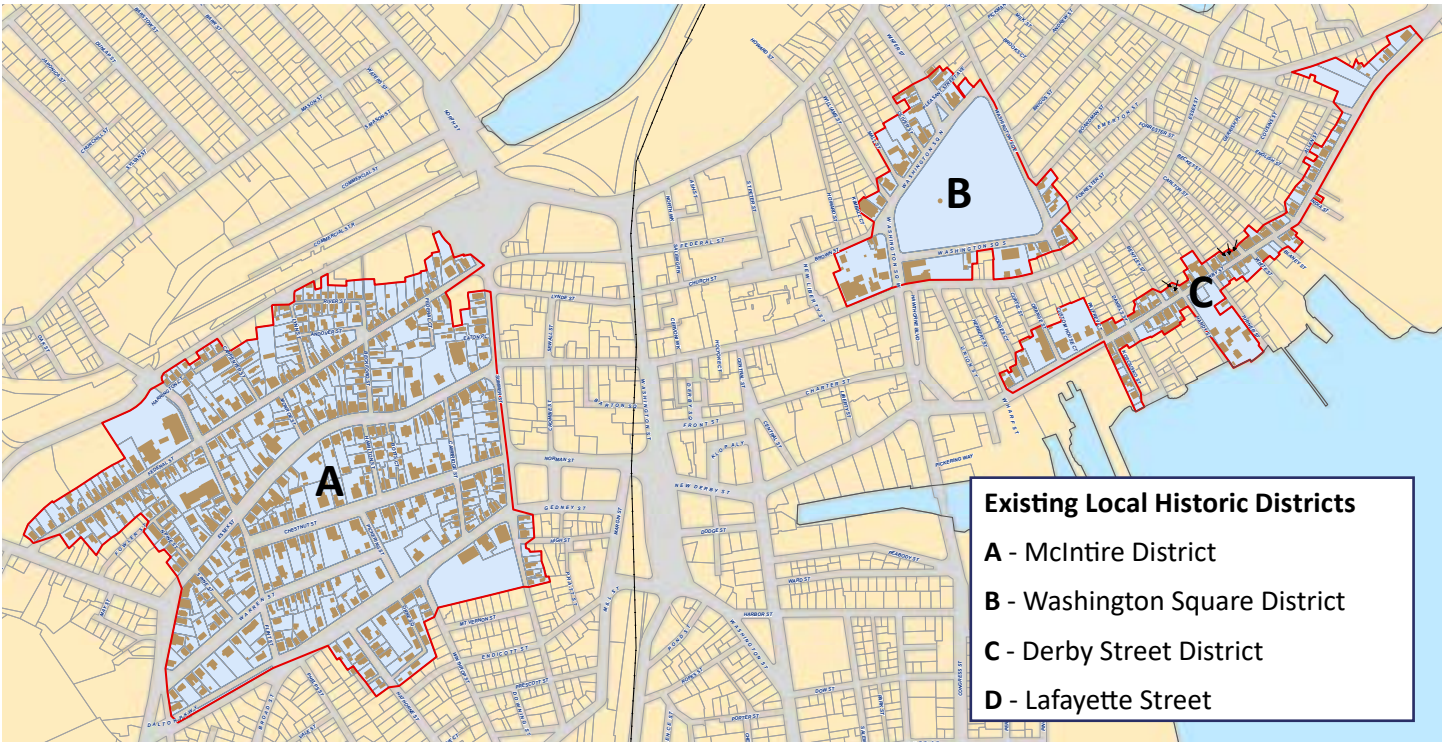


Homes protected in the Lafayette Street Local Historic District

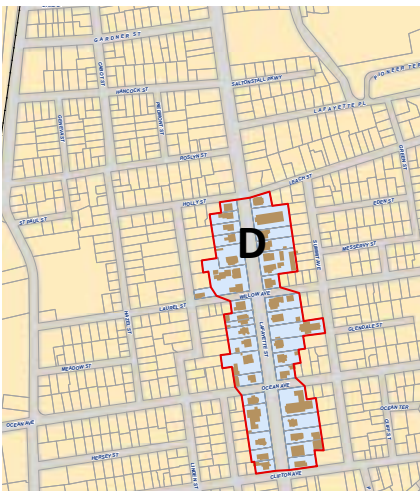
This information is provided by Historic Salem, Inc. and is intended to be an overview for residents and neighborhoods to consider. If there is neighborhood interest in the possibility of a new or expanded LHD or establishing a NPD, the City of Salem (through the Historical Commission or City Council) would need to form a study group. The group would work with city councillors, city planning staff and interested community members to determine whether to move forward to with the appropriate option.



**HISTORIC
SALEM INC**



Existing Local Historic Districts
 A - McIntire District
 B - Washington Square District
 C - Derby Street District
 D - Lafayette Street



BENEFITS OF PRESERVATION PROTECTIONS:

At its fundamental level, preservation protects architectural and historical assets for future generations and provides a tangible link to our past.

Investment Protection

Regulations that protect buildings and neighborhoods are beneficial for homeowners and the community as a whole because the districts provide certainty about future development. The result is a stabilization of property values and protection of investments by ensuring that adjacent properties are cared for at a similar level and that any change maintains or improves the buildings.

Sustainability

Historic districts encourage communities to retain and use their existing resources in established neighborhoods. Reuse of buildings greatly reduces landfill waste. Reuse of older buildings takes advantage of existing walkable neighborhoods and many older buildings were designed with energy conservation in mind, taking advantage of natural light, cross-ventilation, and climate-appropriate materials.

Social Benefits

The process of establishing historic protections creates intangible benefits including strengthening neighborhood identity, encouraging social cohesion, and creation of social capital. These benefits cannot be quantified, yet they are an invaluable asset in community building.

Overall

Historic preservation is a tool for strengthening American communities. It can be used to achieve a wide range of public goals including:

- affordable housing
- sustainable development
- neighborhood stabilization
- job creation
- promotion of arts and culture
- heritage tourism
- economic development



Homes protected by the Derby Street Local Historic District



Homes of equal significance one block away on Essex Street, not included in a Local Historic District.

Preservation of our historic neighborhoods is a key element in continuing the success of Salem as an appealing place to live and visit.

| LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT (LHD) | NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION DISTRICT (NPD) |
|---|---|
| An appointed commission provides regulatory oversight of individual building features based on MA General Law Chapter 40C. | An appointed commission (separate from the Salem Historical Commission) would provide regulatory oversight on customized characteristics that are district specific and determined during creation of the district. |
| Protects exterior elements that are visible from a public way through a required review of alterations to a property. | Flexible in that it allows neighborhood residents to determine which building elements should be protected. |
| Although districts include many blocks, the focus is on each individual building's historic character. | Focuses on various elements that make up a neighborhood's character. Boundaries are usually set by outlining an area with similar characteristics. |
| All four of Salem's LHDs utilize the same design guidelines. | Each NPD would have its own unique set of design guidelines. |
| All four of Salem's LHDs are administered by the Salem Historical Commission. | A NPD is administered by a Preservation District Commission that includes neighborhood members. |
| For a Local Historic District (new or expansion of existing) the study process would determine logical boundaries and engage property owners in a conversation about challenges and benefits. | There is a draft NPD ordinance that is ready to review and update. An interested neighborhood would need to work with their ward councillor to have it approved by the City Council. |
| Expansion of existing districts or adding new districts would use the existing the LHD regulations and standing commission. | The ordinance would need to be accepted by the City Council and a NPD commission established, in addition to developing regulations for individual neighborhoods. |
| Establishing new or expanded districts are zoning changes that require a 2/3 majority vote by the City Council. | This type of district is new to Salem so it would likely take more upfront effort to form but, potentially, have fewer restrictions when completed. |

WHAT ABOUT NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICTS?

People, in Salem especially, take pride in their historic places. Ten neighborhoods have been designated as National Register Historic Districts, indicating that they have significant architectural or historic merit. This designation provides not only pride-of-place but also educational value. However, there are no preservation protections associated with National Register designation. (Exception: If an owner is seeking federal or state funding or permits there is an associated review of impacts on historic resources. This is rarely the case with private homeowners and small-scale developers).



WHAT ABOUT HISTORIC HOUSE PLAQUES?

Historic Salem, Inc. house plaques, while certainly something to be proud of, are purely educational. Information on a house plaque is verified by researchers, but an HSI house plaque provides no regulatory protection.



WHAT ABOUT HISTORIC DOWNTOWN?

Salem's downtown business district is not in a Local Historic District. It is protected as part of the Salem Urban Renewal Area that has similar design guidelines and protections against demolition. The success of Salem's Downtown is evidence of the economic power of preservation.

Bridge Street is listed on the National Register of Historic Places but has no preservation regulations. The 2009 Neighborhood Preservation District Study recommended Bridge Street for a potential NPD (along with many other Salem neighborhoods).



Example of new construction that doesn't fit the neighborhood character.



Partial demolition of this home in the Derby Street neighborhood was not regulated by the demo-delay ordinance.

DOES MY NEIGHBORHOOD REALLY NEED PROTECTION?

Most of your neighbors are probably responsible stewards of their home and neighborhood – just like you. You might be confident they won't make any changes that will have a negative impact on your street. On the other hand, if you are happily maintaining your historic house, but a new neighbor wants to build an enormous addition or tear down the first house built on the street and rebuild – what would stop them? And what impact would that change have on you and other responsible neighbors?

BUT WHAT ABOUT...

RISING HOUSING PRICES?

It is often stated that property values “go up” in a Historic District with a benefit to those already in the neighborhood. However, the underlying statistics show that what really happens is that historic district designation is a stabilization tool, rather than a tool for increasing property values. Across the country, during the 2008 recession and housing crash, it took longer for historic districts to experience the effects, they recovered more quickly, and there were fewer foreclosures within district boundaries. This effect was seen equally in low-, middle-, and upper-priced historic neighborhoods. This impact is a benefit to both homeowners and the wider community that are influenced by comparable sales.

COST OF HOME REPAIRS?

Owning a home comes with the expectation of repair costs. Owning an older home, whether in or out of a historic district, comes with specific types of needed repairs. Keep in mind that the quality of many older Salem homes is already quite high. Historic district protection regulates the quality of repairs but also encourages retention of building material. Repairing, rather than replacing, means projects may have a higher labor cost that is off-set by a lower material cost. (This provides an additional benefit because the money spent on skilled labor tends to stay in the community, while money spent on mass produced material tends to go into other communities and corporate accounts.)

PROPERTY RIGHTS?

Every building in Salem is regulated in some way by existing city ordinances. When a buyer purchases a property, they can easily educate themselves about what is allowed on their property and what they can expect from properties surrounding them. Historic district protections *do not* limit use. Historic district protections *do not* require repairs. Historic district protections *do* impact the design and quality of changes to the exterior of the buildings. When someone buys a property in a historic district they are acquiring the benefits of the designation, as well as the requirements.

DEMOLITION DELAY?

Any structure in the city that is over 50 years old must wait six months before being demolished, unless granted a waiver. This review is only triggered if the entire building is proposed to be torn down. Salem's current demo-delay ordinance is considered outdated with many other communities requiring 12-18 month delays and regulating partial demolition.

Contact Historic Salem to schedule a Q&A discussion in your neighborhood.

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The Neighborhood Preservation District Study report can be found under studies at www.salem.com

Contact the City of Salem's Preservation Planner
(978) 619-5685

Information about costs and benefits of preservation protection can be found at:

National Trust for Historic Preservation
www.SavingPlaces.org
PlaceEconomics
www.placeeconomics.com