

HOW TO ESTABLISH A HISTORIC DISTRICT OR HISTORIC PROPERTY

Before the establishment of a historic district or historic property, the following steps shall be taken:

STEP 1: PREPARATION OF PRELIMINARY REPORT

The historic district/historic property study committee, appointed by the legislative body of the municipality, investigates the historical significance of the building or buildings, structures, features, places, or surroundings proposed as an historic district and designates the area to be included.

STEP 2: TRANSMITTAL OF PRELIMINARY REPORT

The historic district/historic property study committee transmits the preliminary report on its investigation simultaneously to the Wilton Planning & Zoning Commission and to the Connecticut Historical Commission.

STEP 3: RECOMMENDATIONS OF PRELIMINARY REPORT

The Planning & Zoning Commission and the Connecticut Historical Commission give their recommendation to the study committee within 65 days from the date of transmission of the preliminary report. Failure to deliver these comments and recommendations shall be taken as endorsement.

STEP 4: PUBLIC HEARING

The study committee conducts a public hearing on establishment of the proposed historic district/historic property neither less than 65 nor more than 130 days after the transmittal date of its report in STEP 2. Written notice is given to all property owners of record included in the proposed district/property, as they appear on the last completed grand list, at least 15 days before the hearing. Written notice includes:

- (1) The preliminary report of the study committee (or a synopsis).
- (2) All recommendations made by the P&Z Commission and Connecticut Historical Commission.
- (3) A map showing the boundaries of the proposed historic district.
- (4) The proposed historic district ordinance.

A legal advertisement is published twice in the local newspaper.

STEP 5: SUBMISSION OF FINAL REPORT

The historic district/historic property study committee submits its final report to the legislative body within 65 days after the public hearing. The report contains:

- (1) A complete description of the area, including number of buildings and their ages.
- (2) An analysis of the historical significance and architectural merit of the buildings in the district and the significance of the district as a whole.
- (3) A map showing the boundaries of the proposed historic district.
- (4) A proposed historic district ordinance.
- (5) The report and recommendations of the Connecticut Historical Commission.
- (6) Such other matters as the committee may deem necessary and advisable.

STEP 6: BALLOTING OF PROPERTY OWNERS

After reviewing the report of the study committee, the legislative body of the town causes ballots to be issued to the owners of all properties included in the proposed district/property on the question of adoption of a historic district/historic property ordinance.

STEP 7: ACTION BY LEGISLATIVE BODY OF MUNICIPALITY

If two-thirds of those voting in STEP 6 vote affirmatively, the legislative body may:

- (1) Accept the report of the study committee and enact an historic district/historic property ordinance; or
- (2) Reject the report of the study committee, stating the reasons for its decision; or
- (3) Return the report to the study committee with amendments and revisions it deems advisable for consideration by the committee and request a further report to the legislative body within 65 days of the return.

STEP 8: ORDINANCE IMPLEMENTATION

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT HISTORIC DISTRICT OR HISTORIC PROPERTY DESIGNATION

WHAT IS A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

The Connecticut Historical Commission defines a historic district as “an area, or a cluster of related buildings, or objects and structures, in a compatible setting which, taken as a whole, visually expresses styles and modes of living representative of various periods in American History.”

WHAT IS A HISTORIC PROPERTY?

The Connecticut Historical Commission defines a historic property as “any individual building, structure, object or site that is significant in the history, architecture, archeology and culture of the state, its political subdivisions or the nation and the real property used in connection therewith.”

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A HISTORIC DISTRICT OR HISTORIC PROPERTY?

The purpose of an historic district/historic property, administered by a Historic District and Historic Property Commission, is a legal tool designed to preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places which contribute to the visual character of the area associated with the history of a period or style of architecture of the municipality, of the state, or of the nation.

This legislative mechanism of the enabling statute gives local residents control over what will happen in the future to the quality and appearance of their own community. Its purpose is not to prevent change but to insure that exterior changes are architecturally appropriate and in keeping with the character of the district.

HOW DOES HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION PROTECT AND PRESERVE?

The enabling legislation gives authority to the local Commission to review and judge alterations, additions, and demolitions to buildings and structures and evaluate whether they are consistent with existing architectural and historical character.

Except for deed covenants or easements, historic district designations are the most powerful guarantees for preservation of historic structures currently available in Connecticut law.

However, it is important to understand that historic district designation carries with it no inherent restriction, only a review process to prevent incongruous change.

WHAT WILL LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT OR HISTORIC PROPERTY DESIGNATION DO FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

Historic district or historic property designation will work to protect and preserve the visual character of the neighborhood. Of all the mechanisms employed to protect buildings and sites that have architectural and historical significance, local historic district designations are the ones that work best. They do so because they function pursuant to locally approved ordinances that govern exterior, publicly viewable changes.

WOULD PROPERTY OWNERS HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT HOW THE COMMISSION DISCHARGES ITS RESPONSIBILITIES?

Each application to the Commission requires a public hearing and notice of such a hearing. Property owners may attend the hearings and express their opinions.

HOW WILL HISTORIC DISTRICT OR HISTORIC PROPERTY DESIGNATION AFFECT WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH THE PROPERTY?

Any proposed exterior change to the property that is visible from the public right-of-way is legally subject to judgment by the Historic District and Historic Property Commission. Property owners must submit an application to the Wilton Historic District and Historic Property Commission for review in each of the following situations. If approved, a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued and the work may proceed after approval by the Building Department.

1. Erection of new building or structure.
2. Exterior alteration of an existing building or structure.
3. Demolition or removal of a building or structure.
4. Parking for any commercial, business, or home industry use.

The historic district and historic property commission has NO authority over:

1. Maintenance and repair of the property.
2. The use of the property.
3. The color of the exterior paint.
4. The interior arrangement or structures.
5. The portion of a property not visible from the public right-of-way.

If a Certificate of Appropriateness is denied, the Commission must state the reasons for its determination and the bases for its conclusion that the proposed activity would not be appropriate. The Commission may make recommendations relative to exterior design, arrangement, texture, material and similar features. The Commission may issue a Certificate of Appropriateness with stipulations.

WHAT ABOUT NEW CONSTRUCTION IN THE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT OR HISTORIC PROPERTY?

The Commission rules only on the appropriateness of proposed new construction. This does not mean that all new construction must be historic in design and appearance.

WHAT OTHER LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS EXIST IN WILTON? IN THE STATE?

There are five Historic Districts in Wilton: #1 - Lambert Corners at 150 Danbury Road; #2 - Wilton Congregational Church, Old Town Hall, and surrounding buildings; #4 - Hurlbutt Street School House at 157 Hurlbutt Street, and #5 - Wilton Historical Society Museum Complex at 224 Danbury Road, and #6 - Georgetown Neighborhood.

Currently over 6,000 buildings are protected in 107 local historic districts in 65 towns in Connecticut.