

# Chapter 3: Frequently Asked Questions

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**In this chapter you will find:**

- What makes a property historic?
- Why does Independence have a historic preservation program?
- What is the Independence Heritage Commission?
- What does it mean to be a locally versus a nationally designated historic property?
- What are the benefits of owning a historically designated property?
- How does local historic designation benefit the neighborhood and why do exterior improvements require design review?
- What areas of the city are already designated as historic?
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Photograph on cover page: The President leaves Margaret in Independence as crowd surrounds them, June 1948, 98-1305, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **WHAT MAKES A PROPERTY HISTORIC?**

To be considered historic, a property is typically at least 50 years old and appears much as it did when it was originally constructed. If it would be unrecognizable on the outside to its original owners, it probably has lost most of its architectural integrity.

In order to be designated “historic,” the property must also: be affiliated with an important event, be associated with an important person, reflect a unique style of architecture or design, or be associated with a pre-historic (archaeological) site. Examples of resources can include famous houses, battlefields, commercial buildings, and barns, to name just a few. Properties that contribute to the overall context within historic districts, are considered historic. Cemeteries or burial sites are generally not eligible for national or state significance.

### **WHY DOES INDEPENDENCE HAVE A HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM?**

The City of Independence recognized in the early 1970s that, without some form of protection and review, significant buildings, sites, and structures could be lost or irreversibly changed. In order to begin documenting and protecting these resources, the City adopted an ordinance that allowed for the creation of: the Independence Heritage Commission, a designation process, a design review, and a demolition review process. The City was formally recognized by the State of Missouri in 1987 as a Certified Local Government (CLG) for its preservation program aimed to document, designate, preserve, and protect its historic resources.

### **WHAT IS THE INDEPENDENCE HERITAGE COMMISSION?**

The Independence Heritage Commission is a citizen board of nine members appointed by the Independence City Council. Two of the nine commissioners serve as ex-officio members representing the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum and the Harry S. Truman National Historic Site which is owned and operated by the National Park Service. Appointed members must either live or work in Independence and can serve no more than two consecutive three-year terms.

The Commission is responsible for reviewing proposed exterior alterations for all locally designated historic sites. They also make recommendations to the Planning Commission and City Council regarding community preservation issues and historic designations and work to promote public outreach and education. Commission meetings are held at 6:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month in City Hall. City Hall is located at 111 E. Maple, Independence, MO 64050 and can be reached at (816) 325-7000.

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A LOCALLY VERSUS A NATIONALLY DESIGNATED HISTORIC PROPERTY?**

Listing on the *Local Register of Historic Places* means that the City of Independence has recognized that property as being significant at a local, regional, state, or national level. Local designation is the highest form of protection that can be bestowed on a historic property as all exterior improvements require design review by the owner, City staff, and/or by the Heritage Commission. Similar to a Homeowner's Association, this review ensures that a minimum standard is followed to protect the look and feel of that historic property. The design review process provides a level of protection against inappropriate and irreversible alterations, additions, and demolition.

In exchange for review, property owners can benefit from stabilization of their property values, and tend to see an increase in values over properties that are not designated. The City does not mandate any changes (for example reversing previous inappropriate alterations) or require upgrades to a property based upon its historic designation.

Listing in the *National Register of Historic Places* means that the federal government recognizes the property for its architectural or historical affiliations also at a local, state, or national level. However, the *National Register* holds properties to a higher standard in that they must retain a significant level of integrity in order to be honored.

*National Historic Landmarks* (NHL) are buildings, districts, sites, structures, and objects designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they are: sites where events of national historical significance occurred; places where prominent Americans lived or worked; icons of ideals that shaped the nation; outstanding examples of design or construction; places characterizing a way of life; or archeological sites able to yield information.

*Note:* National designation is merely honorary and requires no design review at the local, state, or federal level. Designation on the *National Register* or *National Historic Landmarks* also provides little to no protection, from inappropriate alterations or even demolition.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF OWNING A HISTORICALLY DESIGNATED PROPERTY?**

Locally designated properties and districts are better protected from inappropriate change. The local review process provides an opportunity for citizens to comment on whether proposed changes may detract from the look and feel of the neighborhood. This protection is similar to that provided by Home Owner's Associations (HOAs). Further, property values tend to stabilize and often increase as a result of local historic designation and the added protection it brings.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Properties listed in the *National Register of Historic Places* may qualify for state or federal (income-producing properties only) rehabilitation tax credits. These tax credits are available for rehabilitation work on eligible historic buildings. In Independence, this would include individually listed National Register properties and many of the properties located within the Harry S. Truman National Historic Landmark District (See Appendix A for a map of the district). Refer to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources website for information about the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office and the state review requirements for National Register applications, and more in depth information about rehabilitation tax credits (eligibility, requirements, applications and the review process). <http://dnr.mo.gov/shpo>

### **HOW DOES LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION BENEFIT THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND WHY DO EXTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS REQUIRE DESIGN REVIEW?**

Unique architectural features and traditional streetscapes are most likely what attracted owners to an area where they first purchased their historic property. Protection of features such as mature trees, quality craftsmanship, superior materials and design, and walkable streets is the intent of the designation and the design review process.

Studies have repeatedly shown that the higher standards designated properties are held to help to stabilize and even increase property values. Designated historic districts become more desirable neighborhoods and often see consistent investment, even in neighborhoods that are in decline. Properties listed for sale in designated districts also tend to move more quickly than similar properties in un-designated districts.

### **WHAT AREAS OF THE CITY ARE ALREADY DESIGNATED AS HISTORIC?**

Independence has one local historic district, the Harry S. Truman Heritage District (designated in 1973), and a federally recognized district, the Harry S. Truman National Historic Landmark District (designated in 1971). Additionally, there are 26 individual buildings/structures that have been listed as “local landmarks” and 23 individual properties listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*.

### **CAN I STILL MAKE CHANGES TO MY PROPERTY ONCE IT IS DESIGNATED AS HISTORIC?**

Yes. Designation does not prohibit alterations or additions to historic properties. In fact, property owners are always encouraged to make improvements to their properties in historic districts. Property owners may construct free-standing garages, add an addition onto an existing house, or even install solar panels and insulation, assuming the review process is followed and the appropriate minimal design guidelines are upheld. Some exterior changes require either administrative or Heritage Commission approval only to ensure that the alterations maintain the historic character of a property while meeting the modern-day needs of residents and owners. Design review also helps to ensure the traditional streetscape features such as mature trees, walkways, and building orientation are also maintained.

### **DO INTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS AND ROUTINE MAINTENANCE REQUIRE REVIEW?**

No. Interior improvements and routine indoor and outdoor maintenance such as painting, caulking, weatherstripping, rotted wood repair replaced with wood, and landscaping (except removal of mature trees) requires no review by the Heritage Commission. Refer to Chapter 6 - Application Process for Rehabilitation for the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) Matrix in order to review the most common types of property improvements and their review requirements, if any.

### **WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

For more information regarding historic designation and Independence's Historic Preservation Program, contact the Historic Preservation Division:

City of Independence, Missouri  
Historic Preservation Division  
111 East Maple  
Independence, Missouri 64050

(816) 325-7419 Phone  
(816) 325-7400 Fax