

OBERLIN'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

An applicant's guide to city historic landmark status

The Oberlin City Council in 2000 passed an historic preservation ordinance, updating an earlier ordinance that had established the Historic Preservation Commission and set standards for the selection of city historic landmarks. The 2000 ordinance expanded the earlier one by protecting these landmarks, thus preserving the city's irreplaceable architectural heritage. Copies of the ordinance are on file at City Hall.

WHAT ARE THE STANDARDS FOR SELECTION OF CITY HISTORIC LANDMARKS?

An historic landmark is a building or site that has particular historic or cultural significance, or is associated with historic people or events, or reflects distinguishing characteristics of an architect or architectural style.

HOW DOES AN OWNER APPLY FOR CITY LANDMARK STATUS FOR A PROPERTY?

Application forms are available at the Oberlin Planning and Development Office, 69 South Main Street, telephone 775-7182.

HOW DOES THE PRESERVATION ORDINANCE WORK?

The ordinance requires that the Historic Preservation Commission review all proposed alterations to the exteriors of landmark buildings. Before work begins, the Commission must issue a Certificate of Appropriateness .

The Commission's five members are appointed by City Council to serve five-year terms. Each member must have a knowledge of or known interest in architecture, preservation, or design. Commission meetings are held every month in City Hall. The times are announced in the Oberlin News Tribune. Questions about Commission meetings should be directed to Oberlin Planning and Development Office.

WHAT TYPES OF WORK NEED A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS?

The Commission must review all plans for exterior alterations and all requests for permits to demolish structures. It is also concerned with projects that disturb land that may contain archeological remains.

WHAT WORK DOES NOT NEED A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS?

The Commission does not review the ordinary maintenance of the ordinary maintenance of the exterior where there will be no change in design, texture, or materials. It also does not review interior work or exterior landscaping.

WHAT STANDARDS OF APPROPRIATENESS DOES THE COMMISSION USE?

The Commission makes decisions based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. A list of these standards is available at the Oberlin Planning and Development Office. The standards provide the framework within which the Commission evaluates proposals. The standards are not rigid regulations. They provide recommendations for rehabilitation and new construction and list certain practices and treatments that should be avoided.

HOW DOES A LANDMARK OWNER APPLY FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS?

Applicants are encouraged to contact the Preservation Commission or the Planning and Development Office early in their project planning. Commission members and city staff will answer questions and provide the application form for the Certificate of Appropriateness. The Commission will review the application at a regular monthly meeting. It will approve or reject an application within 45 days of the filing of a complete application.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE COMMISSION MEETING?

In discussing the project, the Commission will carefully consider all relevant factors, including earlier changes, existing conditions, and surrounding properties. It will make one of the following decisions:

- If the project meets the standards, the Commission will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness.
- If the project meets most of the standards, the Commission may approve the Certificate of Appropriateness with conditions, stating what changes must be made to the plan.
- If the project does not meet the standards, the Commission has the authority to deny a Certificate of Appropriateness. In this case the Commission shall state the reasons for denial in writing. The Commission may suggest changes that can result in approval and offer to continue to meet with the owner to achieve a compromise. Applicants who are denied a certificate may reapply, drop the project, or appeal to the Oberlin City Council.

HOW ARE THE COMMISSION'S DECISIONS ENFORCED?

A Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any work on the exterior of a city historic landmark begins. The City Code Administrator is responsible for ensuring that any construction is in accordance with the Certificate of Appropriateness. Penalties for noncompliance are mandated by the City Ordinance.