



The Benefits of Historic Designation in Webster Groves

Time, geography, people, and events uniquely shape each community. It is the combination of the individual elements—such as houses and yards, businesses and public buildings, trees and sidewalks, streets and alleys—that form a community’s overall character. Webster Groves is fortunate to have a unique and wonderful collection of historic homes, commercial buildings, churches, and educational institutions within its boundaries. To ensure that the city’s historic character endures for generations to come, the City of Webster Groves has taken various measures to protect its historic buildings. One such measure is the creation of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The HPC is empowered to continually research and recommend individual properties or entire geographic areas within the city that may be worthy of protection and recognition. These are known as City-designated Historic Landmarks and city-designated Historic Districts. It is an honor to receive these designations, which are considered special recognition within the community.

The primary reason for establishing historic landmarks or historic districts is to manage how change occurs and thereby ensure that the original character of a building or a geographic area remains constant. Webster Groves currently has 48 historic landmarks and five historic districts. The individual landmarks vary in architectural style, original builder, era of construction, and owner. The five historic districts all have unique characteristics, charters, and guidelines for preservation. Information about the city’s historic landmarks and each of the historic districts is available at the Webster Groves Library, through the Historic Preservation Commission and through the City’s Building Commissioner, or on the City website at www.webstergroves.org.

Changes to Individual Historic Landmarks or Buildings within a Historic District

Changes made to a property impact the adjacent property, the block, the neighborhood, and ultimately the City of Webster Groves as a whole. A historic designation does not equate to a moratorium on change; change is real and is part of life. Through the

building permit process, modifications to the exterior of all buildings, whether historic or not, are permitted with review by the Architectural Review Board (ARB). This includes changes such as exterior remodeling, alterations and additions, and new construction. More routine building changes are delegated to city staff for review. The ARB helps owners develop appropriate plans and designs that protect against unnecessary destruction of important historic features, while at the same time encouraging property owners to make improvements to their properties. For an individual landmark or a building within a historic district, the HPC occasionally provides an additional level of review. This occurs **only** when the change to a building involves demolition or relocation of any part of the building or structure, or there is a subdivision, lot split or boundary adjustment of the underlying property. Ordinary maintenance and repair of existing features, minor changes, or alterations to the interior of most properties do not require any review by the ARB or HPC.

The Benefits

There are a variety of benefits of historic designation in Webster Groves, over and above the primary reason of managing change in the community. Some benefits, such as an improved image, owners taking better care of their homes, and community pride, are intangible but still very real. Other benefits that are considered more tangible include:



1. Historic Designation

Historic Designation encourages continued interest and research into the community's past for the benefit of future generations. It carries with it a level of prestige, as individual owners take pride in their landmark buildings while owners within a historic district have a collective pride of ownership. Additionally, historic designation offers the following:

- Allows private renewal and architectural creativity within historic standards.
- Protects high quality architecture, mature landscaping and the pedestrian interest and orientation of our historic community, such as walking tours.
- Assists in controlling the demolition of existing properties, such as the tear-down phenomenon where old homes are razed to build new structures, and cases of demolition by neglect, where owners continually fail to do maintenance or upkeep on their home until the building gets to the point of being beyond repair.
- Helps prevent insensitive alterations and out-of-character new construction, while encouraging maintenance and improvements that provide older home modern advantages and technologies.



2. *Increased Property Values and Return on Investment*

Older homes are generally of much higher quality construction versus those homes built today. Materials and finishes, including details, fixtures, floors, and trim are distinctive to their time. Today's mainstream design and construction is not typically as elaborate as that found in older buildings. These historic buildings retain or appreciate in value in part because of their quality craftsmanship. Appreciating assets lead to owners being more willing to invest in the upgrade and maintenance of their properties. Increased property values, in turn, promote increased levels of home ownership and longer ownership duration. The parallel benefit is owner-occupied areas typically have higher participation in community-based planning, since these owners not only have an interest in their immediate historic building or district but in the success of Webster Groves as a whole.

Regarding historic districts specifically, there is something to be said for a group of individuals that can come together, advocate for itself, and make a plan for the future of the buildings in that district's immediate boundaries. This cohesiveness is a success that stabilizes neighborhoods. Through their charters and guidelines, historic districts control demolition, limit inappropriate fill, and ensure the physical integrity of individual properties are maintained. The overlying result is that properties within the historic districts tend to appreciate in value. Since historic districts typically have higher rates of owner occupancy and longer durations of ownership, designation insulates these properties from adverse real estate market swings.



3. *Promotion of Economic Development*

The commitment of home and business owners to occupy and adaptively reuse older structures creates a ripple effect throughout the Webster Groves economy. Historic landmarks and districts that are aesthetically cohesive and well promoted can be a community's major attraction. This in turn encourages business recruitment, job creation, as well as shopping local.



4. *Tax Incentives May Apply*

Homes within state and federally designated districts may be eligible for preservation tax credits. The tax credits can help offset project costs that make restoration and preservation of historic buildings more economically feasible. Tax credits help provide alternatives to demolition, which results in preserving the integrity of the historic structures and can stabilize neighborhoods. Property owners should check with state and national guidelines before planning improvement projects or purchasing a historic property. At this time, there are no tax credit programs for local city-designated landmarks or properties within a historic district. An owner whose property is state or federally designated can look beyond the City of Webster Groves to state or federal resources for possible tax credits programs. Research the U.S. National Park Service website under Preservation Tax Credits for more information regarding these opportunities.



5. *Be Smart and Go Green*

The reuse of historic buildings is an integral part of the sustainability movement. As many have said, the “greenest” building is one that already exists. By preserving and working with our existing structures, we reduce waste and save landfill space. There are an increasing number of historically sensitive products available to improve the energy efficiency of older structures while maintaining the historic integrity of the building. Preservation architects are a good source for these products.