

What is a local historic district (LHD)?

Local Historic Districts are areas of historic and architectural value in which historic buildings and their settings are subject to public review in order to protect their distinctive characteristics. They are also intended to foster greater communication amongst neighbors and encourage new designs that are compatible with the area's setting. Local Historic District ordinances are local laws that are adopted by communities under Chapter 40C of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, enacted in 1960. Historic District Commissions ensure that changes and additions are appropriate to the architectural and historic values of the district.

Does Newton already have any local historic districts?

The City of Newton currently has four: Upper Falls, Chestnut Hill, Newtonville, and Auburndale. Each local historic district has its own commission comprised of Newton residents, at least three of whom reside in the district and who volunteer to serve and are realtors, architects, attorneys, or citizens at large.

What villages are proposing new local historic districts?

Ad hoc volunteer committees in Newton Highlands and West Newton are proposing to add local historic districts in portions of those villages. These groups have prepared draft study reports for the review and approval by the Newton City Council. Links to these reports may be found at www.newtonma.gov. Both reports were approved by the Newton Historical Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

My property is located in a proposed local historic district. What will it mean for my property?

Buildings located in a Local Historic District are subject to review if there is a proposed change to the form and materials to be used, and if these changes are visible from a public way. Maintenance is not subject to local historic district review. This review process ensures that changes in form or materials to a historic building will not detract from the district's historic character. This law also takes into account the materials on your house at the time the local historic district goes into effect. No property owner will be required to restore their home to a historical appearance.

What if my property is located at a street corner?

All proposed changes to materials on a building that are visible from a public way come under review by the local historic district commission.

How does Newton establish a new local historic district?

The Secretary of the Commonwealth has issued a publication entitled [Establishing Local Historic Districts](#), which details the steps communities must take to legally establish a Chapter 40C Local Historic District in their town or city.

Where are we in the process of reviewing the two new LHDs in Newton?

Both proposed district proposals in Newton Highlands and West Newton were heard before public hearings held by the Zoning and Planning Committee of the City Council, combined with the Planning Board. Both hearings are still open and will remain so until the fall.

How many towns and cities in Massachusetts have local historic districts? How many have more than one like Newton does?

According to data provided by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, 125 towns and cities in Massachusetts have local historic districts authorized under either Chapter 40C or by special legislation. As of this writing, 46 communities have more than one local historic district. Communities that allow individual local historic districts (e.g. a single historic property) have a great deal more of them.

Can new construction happen in a local historic district?

Yes, contingent upon commission review and approval.

Can multi-family housing be included in a local historic district?

Yes. Local historic districts have no review authority over the use of historic structures or their interiors.

Will maintenance of my building come under review in a local historic district?

No. There are also no requirements to maintain a building on a certain schedule.

Will I be able to paint my building any color I want without commission review?

Yes. Neither painting nor paint color are regulated by local historic districts.

How do I know which designs are acceptable in a local historic district?

In 2010, all of the City's historical commissions adopted Design Guidelines (prepared by Preservation Design Partnership, LLC in Philadelphia, PA) for use by citizens and commissions to ensure that new designs are in keeping with the significance of historic structures. Guidelines include how to design historically appropriate additions and new construction.

How do I appeal a decision by the Local Historic District Commission?

Decisions may be appealed within 20 days after a Certificate has been issued by the Commission. In Newton, an ad hoc committee assembled by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) acts as the appellant board.

May I opt out of a local historic district once it has been established?

Individual properties may not opt out of a local historic district once it has been established by the City Council.