



*Helping Communities face the challenges and impacts of growth while maintaining their character and sense of place.*

## Historic Districts

Historic districts can be an asset to any community. Traditional land use patterns and vernacular architectural styles often create appealing places to live, work, or visit. As growth occurs, historic districts can face serious challenges from actions that put their character at risk. Adjustments to the architectural features of buildings such as window size and orientation, roofline and materials, ornamentation, and proportions that are out of character with the district can disrupt the feel of an entire neighborhood. Similarly, changes to the streetscape, including oversized signs, awnings, frontal parking lots, and setbacks can dramatically alter the appearance of historic districts. New development that uses incompatible materials, architectural styles, or unsuitable scales in historic areas creates an inharmonious effect. Two different legal programs exist to help preserve historic districts while allowing the neighborhoods to grow and prosper. See the [New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources](#) website for NH Programs and link to the [National Register of Historic Places](#) and NH National Register Properties list.

iTRaC is the Nashua Regional Planning Commission's new approach to community planning that focuses on integrating transportation, land use and environmental planning. The program was developed to assist communities in dealing with the challenges of growth in a coordinated way that sustains community character and a sense of place.

### National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places provides recognition from the Federal Government and endows honorary status with some financial incentives to individual work projects on properties within a district.

- Historic condition is determined by adherence to uniform, national standards
- Tax incentives are available for qualified rehabilitation projects
- The effects of federally assisted work projects on the character of the district must be considered

Registered status is no guarantee of protection; owners of registered properties are still permitted to maintain and alter their property in any way they choose.



Center Hall in Lyndeborough is on the National Register of Historic Places.

A combination of these tools creates a thorough, successful regulatory system that is locally devised and enforced yet provides access to federal funding.

### Local Historic Districts

Historic districts are established in historic preservation zoning ordinances developed by residents and local officials to protect an entire historic area.

- Historic condition is determined by adherence to locally selected criteria.
- Ordinances can include a design review process to protect character-defining architectural features of existing buildings and require such features for all new development within the district.
- Historic District Commissions can review proposed demolitions within the district.

Property owners within the district must adhere to the ordinance as they would any zoning requirements and proposed changes must be reviewed by the historic district commission. See the following related NH statutes: [RSA 673:4](#); [RSA 673:4-a](#)



The Amherst Village Historic District



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## HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCES

Historic preservation ordinances are a municipal policy to protect the appearance of historic properties; they are not intended to freeze a place in time or stop growth. In fact, the vibrancy and attractiveness of preserved historic districts often invite economic development.

### Benefits of Historic District Regulations

The strength of a local historic designation lies in the support of the community. As a land use law, such an ordinance must be voted into law by residents who want to preserve the character of their neighborhood's homes, commercial buildings, and street-scape. The specifics of the law will reflect the priorities of the residents.

- Citizens can control how their community will evolve by creating a design review process.
- Investments are protected because new development will maintain the quality and character of the existing built environment.
- Property values are stabilized or increase because of the appeal of historic districts and the assurance of its continued quality.
- The local economy flourishes as the aesthetic cohesion of the district attracts tourists and businesses.
- The community attains a sense of empowerment from the cooperation and participation required to create such an ordinance and a stronger sense of place resulting from a tangible link to the past.

Local historic districts do not require:

- Review for changes to the interior of historic buildings, superficial changes like new paint colors, or basic maintenance.
- Expensive and exacting restoration requirements.



(left to right): Frye's Measure Mill, Wilton; Hills Memorial Library, Hudson; Hollis Village Historic District; and the Milford Cotton & Woolen Manufacturing Co. are all on the National Register of Historic Places.

### Provisions of a Historic Preservation Ordinance

A successful historic preservation ordinance has several parts. The ordinance must set out the particular design criteria locally recognized as critical to maintaining the character of the district. A commission must be established to administer the ordinance and would ideally contain members with knowledge of architecture, engineering, law, design, real estate, or local history. The commission will determine the historic appropriateness of proposed new construction and modifications to existing structures. It can delay or deny permission to demolish historic structures and can mandate minimal maintenance requirements to prevent the complete deterioration of structures. The ordinance must provide enforcement mechanisms to make the commission's decisions binding and must establish a system for appeals. See the following related NH statutes: [RSA 674:45](#); [RSA 674:46](#); [RSA 674:46-a](#)

