

## **What's the Difference Between a National Register Historic District and a Local Historic District?**

*A National Register District Identifies; a Local District Protects.*

Both National Register district and locally designated historic districts can be used as effective preservation tools, either independently or together, to help preserve a community's historic resources. For example, the National Register program might be used as a convenient and credible way to identify a community's historic resources, followed by local district designation, which would further protect and enhance those resources through the process of design review. Conversely, a local survey to establish a local historic district might also be used as the basis for a National Register district nomination, which would afford additional preservation incentives, including rehabilitation tax credits, to properties protected in the local district. Local district designation might also be used to selectively protect portions of National Register districts considered especially significant to a community or subject to particularly strong development pressures. Local designation also might be afforded to an area larger than a National Register district to provide an even greater degree of protection to the historic resources within the National Register district.

Some community's preservation needs may be met entirely with either a locally designated district or a National Register district; there are many examples in Georgia of both situations. Other communities may believe that a package involving both types of districts works best. Remember: local districts and National Register districts are different, but complementary, and can work effectively by themselves or together to meet a community's historic preservation needs.

**For further information, visit our Web site at [www.georgiashpo.org](http://www.georgiashpo.org) or contact:  
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Following is a detailed analysis of what both National Register districts and local historic districts are and the ways in which they can be used as preservation planning tool.

## **National Register District**

A National Register historic district is a historic district that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is our country's official list of historic places worthy of preservation. It includes individual buildings, structures, sites, and objects as well as historic districts that are historically, architecturally, or archaeologically significant.

National Register listing recognizes the significance of properties and districts. By doing so, it identifies significant historic resources in a community. Boundaries of National Register districts are tightly drawn to encompass only concentrated areas of historic properties. Information compiled to nominate a historic district can be used in a variety of planning and development activities. National Register listing also makes available specific preservation incentives and provides a limited degree of protection from the effects of federally funded, licensed, or permitted activities.

The National Register is maintained by the U.S. Department of the Interior. In Georgia, the National Register program is administered by the Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Natural Resources. Districts and other properties are listed in the National Register through a 17-step process that involves identification, documentation, and evaluation. National Register historic districts most commonly encompass central business districts, residential neighborhoods, industrial areas, rural areas, and occasionally, entire communities.

## **Local Historic District**

A local historic district is a district designated by a local ordinance, which falls under the jurisdiction of a local historic preservation review commission. A local historic district is generally "overlaid" on the existing zoning classifications in a community. Therefore, a local district commission deals only with the appearance of the district, not with the uses of those properties.

According to the 1980 Georgia Historic Preservation Act which makes such local designations possible, a local historic district is a "geographically definable area, urban or rural, which contains structures, sites, and/or works of art which have special historical or aesthetic interest or value; represent one or more periods or styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of the municipality, county, state, or region; and cause that area to constitute a visibly perceptible section of the community."

The designation of a local district protects the significant properties and the historic character of the district. It provides communities with the means to make sure that growth, development, and change take place in ways that respect the important architectural, historical, and environmental characteristics within a district. Local designation encourages sensitive development in the district and discourages unsympathetic changes from occurring. This happens through a process called design review, whereby the historic preservation commission approves major changes that are planned for the district and issues Certificates of Appropriateness which allow the proposed changes to take place.

## **National Register District**

Identifies significant properties and districts for general planning purposes

Analyzes and assesses the historic character and quality of the district

Designates historic areas based on uniform national criteria and procedures

Sets district boundaries tightly, based on the actual distribution pattern of intact historic properties in the area

Makes available specific federal and state tax incentives for preservation purposes

Provides a limited degree of protection from the effects of federally assisted undertakings

Qualifies property owners for federal and state grants for preservation purposes, when funds are available

Does not restrict the use or disposition of property or obligate private property owners in any way

Does not require conformance to design guidelines or preservation standards when property is rehabilitated unless specific preservation incentives (tax credits, grants) are involved

Does not affect state and local government activities

Does not prevent the demolition of historic buildings and structures within designated areas

## **Local Historic District**

Protects a community's historic properties and areas through a design review process

Protects the historic character and quality of the district with specific design controls

Designates historic areas on the basis of local criteria and local procedures

Sets district boundaries based on the distribution pattern of historic resources plus other preservation and community planning considerations

Provides no tax incentives for preservation purposes unless such are provided by local tax law

Provides no additional protection from the effects of federally assisted undertakings

Does not qualify property owners for federal or state grants for preservation purposes

Does not restrict the use to which property is put in the district or require property owners to make improvements to their property

Requires local historic preservation commission review and approval, based on conformance to local design guidelines, before a building permit is issued for any "material changes" in appearance to the district

Does not affect federal, state, or local government activities

Provides for review of proposed demolitions within designated areas; may prevent or delay proposed demolitions for specific time periods to allow for preservation alternatives.

*revised October 2013*