



Living in a Historic District: What Does It Mean to You?

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I remodel the interior of my home without a Historic Resource Review?

Yes. Interior alterations are not subject to Historic Resource Review. Historic resource review would be required if the interior changes resulted in an exterior alteration such as relocation, introduction, or removal of a window or door, for instance.

2. Will I be limited in the colors I can paint my house?

No. Paint color selection is not a part of the design guidelines and colors are not regulated through Historic Resource Review. Routine repair and maintenance are also exempt from Historic Resource Review.

3. Do I need Historic Resource Review to re-roof my house?

No for typical asphalt composition shingle or other original roofing replacement, which is considered repair under City Code. This includes replacement of the plywood sheathing under the roofing materials. However, a change from one roofing material to another (from ceramic tile to composition shingles, for example) or damage to or replacement of surrounding architectural elements will require Historic Resource Review if they meet the standards of Title 33 and do not require a permit.

4. Will there be limits on what plants and landscaping I can add to the grounds around my home?

No. Fences, street walls, patios, plant selection, and low-level decks (18 inches and below) are not subject to Historic Resource Review.

5. Will I be able to add an addition or expansion to my house?

Yes. Any expansion to a house in a historic district (and any brand new construction) must be scaled and sized to fit the immediate character of surrounding homes and buildings. Beyond that, for non-contributing structures the basic requirement is that the materials and detailing should be consistent with that of the rest of the property and fit the overall character of the district. Much more attention is paid to expansions of contributing buildings, and alterations which compromise the historic look and feel of the street-facing elevations are unlikely to be approved. On the other hand, additions at the back and/or sides which do not visually overwhelm the historic part of the building or create an overall out-of-scale structure relationship to their immediate surroundings are typically approved. All such additions to contributing houses, of course, must be compatible with the architectural style, materials, and details of the historic part of the property.

6. Will an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) be allowed?

Yes. An accessory dwelling is allowed as long as the design is in keeping with the architectural character of the existing house and design guidelines for the district. If the ADU is an interior remodel with no exterior impacts, it would not require a Historic Resource Review.

7. Are solar panels or skylights allowed in historic districts?

Yes. City Code section 33.445.320.B.11 for historic districts provides a path toward exempting solar panels and skylights from Historic Resource Review. The exemption depends on the siting of the house and the design of the solar array. The purpose is to ensure that solar panels are minimally visible from the street. In most cases, front street elevation skylights are not allowed.

8. Are there any "open house" requirements for houses in a historic district?

No.

Types of Historic Resource Review

Type I – Small projects and restoration, meaning that the historic state of the property can be documented and features are being reproduced “in-kind” to match this documentation. This applies to most residential properties in Historic Districts. (\$250)

Type II – Larger projects, exceeding 150 square feet of elevation affected façade area, unless it qualifies as a restoration. Any exterior alteration to an individually listed landmark that is not a restoration. (Min. \$991 and Max. \$6,124)

Type III – Generally applies to substantial new construction on vacant land in a Historic District. (Min. \$10,726)

Type IV – Applies to demolition of a landmark building or contributing resource in a Historic District. (\$8,902)

Glossary

Contributing Structure—A building or structure in a Historic District that contributes to the district's historic associations or historic architectural qualities. Its presence adds to the historic look and feel or architectural qualities that make the district historically important. Contributing buildings generally retain a significant amount of their original historic appearance. Contributing buildings in most districts fall within certain construction dates specific to the district and outlined in the district's nomination.

Design Guidelines—Detailed, written standards governing new structures and alterations to existing structures in a Conservation District or a Historic District. Many, but not all such Districts in Portland, have their own Design Guidelines written specifically for that district approved by the Landmarks Commission and adopted by City Council. For Historic Districts without their own Design Guidelines, standards are defined in section 33.846.060.G of City Code. They are based loosely on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Resource Rehabilitation.

Historic District—An area designated as historic by listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It includes within its boundaries a significant concentration of properties linked by architectural style, historical development, or a past event. Contributing structures in Historic Districts may be eligible for rehabilitation tax incentives from the State of Oregon and the Federal Government. All structures in the Historic District are subject to Historic Resource Review regardless of their contributing status. Any new structure in the District is subject to Historic Resource Review.

Historic Resource Review—A formal process administered by the City of Portland Bureau of Development Services that evaluates proposed changes to buildings in Historic or Conservation Districts, new construction in Historic Districts and changes to Landmarks under the applicable Design Guidelines. Changes which do not meet the Guidelines will not be permitted.

Non-contributing Structure—Building or structure in a Historic District that falls outside the district's the time period when the area gained its historic significance. Or, a building or structure in a Historic District that has been significantly and irrevocably altered from its original construction.

About Restore Oregon

Preserve, reuse, and pass forward the historic places that make our communities livable and sustainable.

Since 1977, Restore Oregon has evolved over the years, we've always focused on taking care of the places that make Oregon, OREGON: the historic homes and neighborhoods, bridges and barns, churches and Main Streets that make this place so authentic and livable. Our work depends on support from people like you. Please join or donate today.

Program Presented by:

1130 SW Morrison St., Suite 318
Portland, OR 97205
503.243.1923
www.restoreoregon.org



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construction

1729 NE Siskiyou Street
Portland, OR 97212
503.709.0035
www.mccullochconstruction.com