

“What are the economic advantages of a historic district?”

Studies have proven repeatedly that cities with historic districts attract more tourists, residents and new businesses than those without one. A historic district can also increase property values throughout an entire city, protect heritage and stimulate local economy by helping draw in tourists and generating increased sales tax revenues.

Meanwhile, developers, new residents and business owners can feel more comfortable investing for the long term in communities with historic districts. And residents have an increased sense of pride in their neighborhoods.

“What is a historic district?”

A historic district is a group of two or more tax parcels and their structures. It can also be an entire neighborhood of structures linked by historical association. Structures within a historic district can differ in architectural style or historical period. A historic district can include both commercial and residential buildings and even different zoning classifications.

“Why do we need a local historic district?”

A historic district protects and increases property values, working much the way that covenants do in high-quality housing developments. It insures that anyone who moves into your neighborhood helps maintain the charm of the district – benefiting both the neighborhood and the entire community.

“What are design guidelines?”

Design guidelines are the standards that will help the city’s historic commission and property owners understand what changes are appropriate in the district. Through text and illustrations, guidelines show options for alterations, additions, and new construction. The guidelines were developed with input from property owners and residents. The Senatobia design guidelines are tailored to suit the city’s unique character and needs.

“What if I own a house that is not historic, but it is included in the district? Do I have to go through the Commission to make repairs?”

Yes – just like every house needs to get a building permit for most major repairs. This protects the value of all properties in the district.

“If my building is included in the local historic district, does that mean I have to make it look more historic?”

No. Preservation ordinances simply ask that any new work fit in with the existing historic buildings and not destroy more of the historic character. There is no requirement for owners to remove later additions or put back missing features.

“Can I paint my house any color I want?”

Yes. However, it is highly encouraged for any property owner to refer to the Historic Palette of colors when choosing an appropriate exterior color.

“Will interior projects be reviewed?”

No. Changes inside a house are only subject to local building codes.

“Will I have to fix up my building?”

There are no requirements on the owner to make any repairs. Current housing and building codes already exist to ensure buildings are in a safe and livable condition.

“Can I make changes to my property if it is in a historic district?”

Yes. Historic district designations do not prevent change. The goal is for changes to fit in with the existing character of the building and district. The changes just need to meet the locally approved design guidelines.

“In a local historic district, what would my first step be if I decided to renovate?”

Your first step should be to look at the design guidelines for Senatobia, MS from the city’s website. You can review the sections relevant to your project and then talk with the staff or Historic Commission members about the project. Then you would then submit an application to the Commission with any supporting documentation needed. Most project require drawings.

“What are my first steps if I want to build in the historic district?”

Talk to the city’s Code Enforcement Officer.

“Will my project take longer?”

Possibly. In a local historic district, owners must get approval for their project before getting a building permit. Our Historic Preservation Commission meets once a month, so property owners need to add a bit more time to their project timeline.

“Will I have to hire an architect?”

If an owner is doing minor work, they may simply need to show the review board photographs of the existing building, and a sample of the material. If the owner is doing a major project, then the building permit process may require that an architect draw or approve the plans.

Licensed architects are trained in historic preservation (and some even specialize in it), but contractors and draftsmen are also permitted to submit designs and plans in many cases.

“Will my renovations be more expensive if I am in a local historic district?”

Projects may actually turn out to be less expensive, particularly when viewed over the long term. For example, repairing historic windows can be less costly than new replacements and add to the aesthetic value of the property. Studies have found that a major commercial preservation project will typically cost four percent less than comparable new construction. In addition, you may be eligible to apply for a façade grant from the Senatobia Main Street Association.

“Can buildings be torn down in a local historic district?”

A building may be torn down in a local historic district if it poses a threat to the health and safety of residents. For buildings that are in sound condition, the preservation ordinance typically outlines steps that must be followed for demolition requests.

The Historic Commission refers to the Mississippi inventory of historic district properties when the matter of demolition is brought up. The inventory rates properties in terms of historic significance. This rating weighs heavily in matters of demolition. Once a property is lost, it's lost to future generations forever.

“Will a local historic district change how I use my property?”

No. Local historic district designation does not change the underlying base zoning. For example, if you own a commercial piece of property, the historic designation will not change that zoning.

“What if I have issues with the decisions of the Commission?”

The Historic Commission is a recommending body, with final decisions made by the Senatobia Board of Alderman. Any property owner who disagrees with the Commission decision has the right to file an appeal with the Senatobia Board of Aldermen. You will need to fill out a form to appeal and the city board will take it up at the next meeting. Expect members of the commission to attend the meeting as well to explain the decision to the council. To obtain an appeal form, see the City Clerk.

“Who are the members of the Historic Preservation Commission?”

Any resident or property owner is invited to apply. Professionals such as architects, planners and contractors are especially encouraged and business people outside the building field are also invited to participate. Other professionals whose experience can be helpful include: historians, realtors, bankers, lawyers, interior designers, planners, architectural historians, educators, and/or archaeologists.

“Do I need a COA to replace windows in my house with new ones?”

Yes, changes to or replacement of major exterior features such as windows and doors requires a COA. Repair is always recommended before replacement.

“We want to add a room onto our historic house, and later we would like to build a carport. Will we need to obtain a COA?”

Yes, additions to existing houses and construction of new buildings both require a COA.

“Where can I find more information about historic preservation?”

<https://www.mdah.ms.gov/historic-preservation>