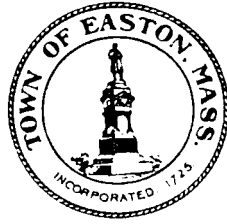


Town of Easton

Local Historic District Study Committee



Frequently Asked Questions

I thought that we were already in a historic district?

North Easton is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a National Register District. The National Register is primarily an honorary designation. North Easton is only minimally protected from state or federally involved projects. By passing a local historic district, the historic character of our town will be much better protected.

How is a local historic district created?

The Board of Selectmen appointed a study committee that to investigate local historic district designation. The study committee holds public meetings, seeks public input, researches the history of the area and prepares a report on their findings. The final step is passage of a historic district bylaw by a two-thirds majority at town meeting.

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

No, you can maintain the current look of your house as long as you would like. A local historic district only reviews proposed changes to exterior architectural features. Routine maintenance of your house is exempt from review.

What kinds of things are reviewed by a historic district commission?

Exterior architectural features visible from a public way are reviewed. Interior changes, landscaping, maintenance, and exterior features not visible from a public way are not reviewed. Other exemptions can also be included in the bylaw.

Who are members of the historic district commission?

A local bylaw describes specifically how the Board of Selectmen will make appointees to the Historic District Commission. In other communities in Massachusetts, the historic district commission consists of members such as architects, realtors, residents and property owners of the district.

Does this mean I can't paint my house any color I want?

While some local historic districts in Massachusetts do include paint color review, we are recommending to NOT include any paint color review.

If my building was located in a local historic district and I was constructing an addition, what would I have to do?

Before acquiring the building permit for your addition, you would fill out an application to the Historic District Commission. The Commission would hold a public hearing and review the proposed plans to

make sure that they are appropriate changes to the historic district. If the addition were appropriate, the district commission would issue a certificate. You would then present the Certificate to the Building Inspector to get your building permit. If the addition were not found appropriate, then the Commission would explain to you how the project could be improved.

Isn't this just another level of bureaucracy?

While it is true that an additional step is needed for some projects, the benefits of protecting the rich architectural heritage found in our town outweigh this added step. North Easton contains buildings 100+ years old. Without a local historic district, these gems that have lasted so long could be demolished or irreparably altered tomorrow.

What will happen to the value of my property if a local historic district is established?

No one can predict the future but studies around the country suggest that property values stay the same or increase faster in local historic districts compared to similar, non-designated areas.

If I and my neighbors already maintain the historic character of our properties, why do we need an historic district?

By having a local historic district, you can be assured that a NEW property owner across the street from your house will also maintain the historic character of the area.

Is a Local Historic District exempt from the 40B comprehensive permit?

The Supreme Judicial Court found that a Local Historic District Commission is a local board and that while not specifically named in Chapter 40B legislation, it still fits within the definition of what constitutes a local board that affects the issuance of building permits.

Is the proposed district a contiguous area that includes all abutting properties?

The properties that were selected include the five H.H. Richardson buildings; the existing Shovel Works buildings including the Antrim Hammer Shop and the Millie Packard House; and the Rockery. With the exception of two of the H. H. Richardson buildings (the Gate Lodge and the Gardner's Cottage), which are located on Elm Street; the proposed properties are contiguous with each other and include no other properties. The two Elm Street H.H. Richardson buildings are non-contiguous within the district.

If the Local Historic District is adopted at Town Meeting when would the Bylaw become effective?

Any new bylaws or bylaw amendments that are adopted at Town Meeting must be sent to the Attorney General's office for review and approval. The Attorney General has 90 days, from date of submission, to approve, disapprove or send back to the Town for modifications. If no response is received, at the end of 90 days, the bylaw is presumed approved. Upon approval, the bylaw becomes effective.

Are fences included in structures that are subject to review?

Fences may be excluded from review. At this time, the Study Committee has not made a determination as to whether fences will be included or excluded.

If this district is established how will it affect the proposed Beacon project?

Beacon Management is fully aware the town is looking to propose establishing this district and have expressed their support. Additionally, one of the key components of their project and the request for a Community Preservation grant is a historical preservation restriction that gives the Town further assurances that the historic character of the Shovel Works structures will be preserved. Additionally, Beacon will be using federal and state tax credits which will require restoration to National Park standards.

If a vacant lot is one of the properties within the district, will it be subject to review?

The proposed district does not include any vacant lots. However, if it did, any structure proposed to be constructed on that lot, after the effective date of the bylaw would be subject to review?

What happens if changes are made to a property within the district without first going through the review process and obtaining the appropriate certificate?

Changes made to a property within a district without first obtaining the appropriate certificate are done so in violation of the bylaw. A fine of no more than \$300 per violation may be imposed by the Commission. Every day the violation remains in effect is considered a new occurrence of the violation and the fine may be imposed for each new occurrence.

If there's a second district, will properties be added as "single" properties, or wouldn't it (make sense) to group properties?

Any additional districts and their composition would be determined by the Study Committee

Can this (the district) be imposed on an unwilling property owner; concerned that town will be taking away an owners right to do what they want with their property?

A Local Historic District must be adopted at Town Meeting by a 2/3rds vote. Local Historic districts provide assurance that future generations will enjoy a historic built environment; provide a visual sense of the past; create neighborhood stabilization and provide schoolchildren with educational opportunities. Historic districts do not prevent all changes, or prevent all demolition, new construction or development. The intent is to make changes and additions harmonious and prevent the intrusion of incongruous elements that might detract from the aesthetic and historic values of the district. (ref. Establishing Local historic Districts, Massachusetts Historical Commission)

Why wasn't a realtor or owner (within district) appointed to the board?

As required by M.G.L. c. 40C, the Board of Selectmen solicited nominees from the Board of Realtors (the Board), the American Institute of Architects and the local Historical Society. Only a nominee from the Easton Historical Society was received in response to the solicitation.

Where can I find the Study Committee's public document?

At the Town of Easton web site. Here is the path to get to the documents:

Town of Easton / Boards & Committees / Local Historic District Study Committee

And here is the link directly to the LHD Study Committee web site:

http://www.easton.ma.us/Directory/local_hist/localhistFS.htm