

PHMC Policy for Determining Historical Significance of Local Historic Districts and Boundary Justification Pursuant to the Pennsylvania Historic District Act (Act 167)

Whereas, to protect historic areas within the Commonwealth, the Historic District Act (Act 167) authorizes all Pennsylvania municipalities – with the exception of cities of the first and second class – to create and define, by ordinance, one or more historic districts; and

Whereas no such municipal ordinance shall take effect until the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) has been notified, in writing, of the ordinance and has certified, by resolution, to the historical significance of the district or districts within the limits defined in the ordinance; and

Whereas Act 167 does not specify any criteria for historical significance; and

Whereas the History Code (Title 37), the PHMC's rule-making authority, authorizes the PHMC to promulgate policy and regulations necessary for the implementation of its powers and duties;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that to comply with the intent of Act 167, the PHMC will use established guidelines for determining historical significance for local historic districts and boundary justifications. *Each application for certification will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis pursuant to the following definitions and criteria:*

District Definition: A local historic district is an area, within a political subdivision, that possesses a group of buildings, monuments, bridges, cemeteries, parks, designed landscapes, or other constructed or naturally-occurring features that have been recognized for their local historical or cultural significance either by the municipality or by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Generally, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will certify that a proposed local historic district is historically significant if certification would promote the goals and objectives of the municipality's comprehensive plan, and if the area meets the criteria described below.

Criteria: PHMC's evaluation of whether a proposed local historic district is historically significant will generally include (but not be limited to) consideration of whether the proposed district:

1. has significant character, interest, or value associated with the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the municipality and is associated with a significant period of time in its history;
2. is representative of the built environment of an era of history as characterized by distinctive architectural styles;
3. is the site or location of a notable local event considered to have had a significant effect on the municipality;
4. is an example of the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community;
5. has achieved significance within the past fifty years or is of exceptional importance to the municipality; and/or
6. possesses a unique location or physical characteristics that represent an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood within the municipality.

Boundary Justification: PHMC's evaluation of a proposed local historic district's boundary will generally include (but not be limited to) consideration of whether the boundary:

1. is based on a municipality's stated goals and objectives of their historic preservation plan and addresses the preservation of historic areas and resources;
2. is based on one or more periods of historical development;
3. acts as a buffer to protect the integrity and character of the historic district; and/or
4. includes a greater proportion of contributing over noncontributing properties.

STEPS TO ESTABLISH A HISTORIC DISTRICT ORDINANCE

AUTHORIZED BY THE HISTORIC DISTRICT ACT

Act of June 13, 1961, P.L. 282, No. 167 as amended, 53 P.S. § 8001, et. seq.

To apply for historic district certification under the Historic District Act, the following checklist with accompanying materials must be completed and submitted to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's Bureau for Historic Preservation (BHP) 45 days prior to the next regularly-scheduled meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC).

CHECKLIST

- A completed Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form (HRSF) for the proposed district.*

When completing the HRSF, refer to the Criteria outlined in the *PHMC Policy for Determining Historical Significance of Local Historic Districts and Boundary Justification Pursuant to the Pennsylvania Historic District Act* to develop the Historical Narrative section.

Although not necessary for PHMC certification, you may also wish to have the district evaluated for National Register eligibility. If so, please follow the Bureau for Historic Preservation's *How to Complete the Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form* when developing the Historical Narrative section in addition to the Historic District Act Policy.

The completed HRSF must also include the following attachments:

1. A parcel map clearly showing the boundaries of the proposed district. The map must include the name of the proposed district, street names, and a north arrow.
2. Current photographs of the district's streetscapes, capturing primary and secondary facades of buildings as well as significant outbuildings and secondary buildings. The number of images necessary will vary depending upon the size of the proposed district; include an appropriate number of images that comprehensively represents the district as it appears today. The photographs must be keyed to a parcel map with the direction of the camera's view indicated.

Digital photographs are preferred. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. It is recommended that digital images be saved in 8-bit (or larger) color format, which provides maximum detail even when printed in black-and-white. Two 4" x 6" photographs may be printed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Please label each photograph with the name of the proposed district, county, municipality, and photo number as it appears on the parcel map. If digital photographs are taken, please remit a CD with JPEG images to the Bureau for Historic Preservation.

3. Provide a boundary justification for the proposed district (please refer to the *PHMC Policy for Determining Historical Significance of Local Historic Districts and Boundary Justification Pursuant to the Pennsylvania Historic District Act*). An inventory, or list, of the properties within the proposed district may need to be completed to justify the boundary. The inventory should at a minimum include: the address and street name, the construction date or period, and whether the property contributes to the historic character of the proposed district.

*If the proposed local district is already located within a district listed in the National Register of Historic Places, please indicate the name of the National Register Historic District:

Submit a parcel map showing the boundaries of the National Register listed district as well as the boundaries for the proposed local district. If the National Register historic district was listed more than 5 years ago, provide current photographs and key the images to a map. A HRSF need not be submitted.

- Copy of the applicable sections of the municipality's comprehensive and/or historic preservation plan which recognizes and addresses the historical or cultural significance of the proposed district.
- Draft of the historic district ordinance. A copy of the draft ordinance should be submitted to the Bureau for Historic Preservation for staff review prior to final approval to the municipality's governing body (this should be accomplished in advance of the 45 days prior to the PHMC meeting to permit time for staff review). Please contact the BHP to request a model historic district ordinance.
- Consult with BHP staff concerning strategies to gain local support for the proposed historic district ordinance.
- Follow appropriate municipal regulations regarding enactment and passage of the ordinance, i.e., schedule a public hearing to allow for public comment and consideration of the proposed historic district ordinance.
- The local governing body adopts the historic district ordinance. A certified (signed and dated) copy of the ordinance must be submitted to the PHMC's Bureau for Historic Preservation.
- A letter addressed to **Jean H. Cutler, Director, Bureau for Historic Preservation** must be submitted by the chief elected official of the local government/municipality requesting that the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission certify the historical significance of the proposed historic district. **All checklist materials must be submitted with this letter.**

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will review all submitted materials at a regularly-scheduled meeting. The PHMC will notify the local government of its official action. The historic district ordinance cannot be enforced until the date of certification by resolution of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

For further information, technical assistance, and/or to schedule a site visit, contact:

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Bureau for Historic Preservation
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