

HISTORIC ALBANY FOUNDATION

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## **NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES DESIGNATION: What? Why? How?**

### **What is the National Register of Historic Places?**

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is the United States federal government's official list of historic districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects deemed to have historical and architectural value and are worthy of being preserved. A list of all National Register (NR) districts, buildings, etc. is available to the public through the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). SHPO is the state office that works the public to list properties, administer the tax credit program, and preserve historic architecture in New York state.

Listing on the National Register makes historic properties eligible for tax incentives and grants for restoration and rehabilitation.



*Lustron Houses of Jermain Street, 2008*

*The Lustron house was the brainchild of Carl Strandlund, an Ohio manufacturer of porcelain coated steel panels, who developed these pre-fabricated all-steel homes to ease the housing shortage for GIs returning from World War II. Only 2,492 houses were built between March 1948 and February 1950, when the company defaulted on its government loans.*

### **What are historic districts?**

A National Register historic district is a geographically definable area, urban or rural, possessing a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development. A district may also comprise individual elements separated geographically but linked by association or history. In a historic district, though some buildings may be eligible for individual listing, the significance of the district as a whole outweighs the significance of the individual buildings.

To become a historic district, the proposed area must meet at least on of four criteria.

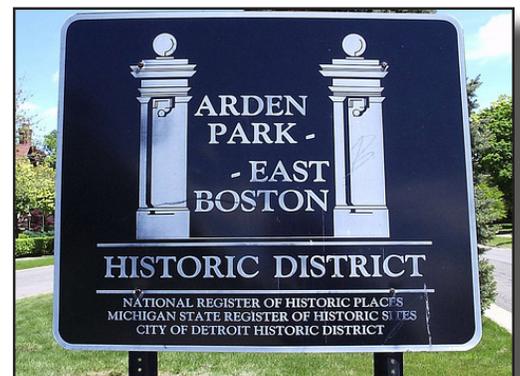
- A. is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### **What does it mean to be in a historic district?**

Historic district designation means that your property is important and should be protected. Plaques, markers, or flags are often used to tell the public that this area is special. Buildings in historic districts may be eligible to apply for rehabilitation tax credits and not-for-profits may be eligible for restoration/rehabilitation grants. Property owners in historic districts can also do preservation easements on their properties which may have tax benefits.

Any project receiving state or federal funds will need to be reviewed by SHPO to ensure the project does not have a negative impact on the district. Some examples are DOT projects, development projects awarded state or federal grants (housing projects, etc.) Tax credit projects are subject to SHPO review.

**Property owners may make any changes they want to their properties. There is no regulation for what property owners can and cannot do UNLESS they take the tax credit. There is no additional permitting process.**



### **How does an area become a historic district?**

The first step is typically to talk to a representative from SHPO. SHPO will determine whether or not a reconnaissance level survey is needed. If the area is very well defined with clear and geographically or thematically appropriate boundaries, is very intact with little alteration to many buildings, and has a very obvious and clear significance, then a full National Register nomination may be undertaken. This is very rarely the case. In the event that the area is very large and may not be entirely eligible or needs research to determine eligibility, a reconnaissance level survey is undertaken.

A **reconnaissance level survey** is a very basic survey that looks at historic maps and tax assessment records to develop a very brief overview of the area's development and period of significance. The objective of the survey is to determine if there is one or more areas within the survey area that are eligible for listing on the National Register. When completed, SHPO will review and determine if the proposed areas are indeed eligible for listing on the National Register.

If any areas are identified as eligible for listing, intense research is done on the neighborhood using maps, tax assessment records, water rents, city directories, census data, and other primary resources to develop a nomination. A **nomination** is comprised of significance statement, narrative history of the proposed historic district, and architectural description of the character of the proposed district. The buildings are photographed and described on inventory forms which document the buildings' age, style, construction, the architect and/or builder, a brief history of the building, and description.

The completed nomination is then sent to SHPO for review and presentation to the New York State Board for Historic Preservation. The Board meets quarterly to discuss nominations. If approved by the Board, the nomination is sent to the National Parks Service (NPS) for final approval. Once NPS approves the nomination, a letter is sent to SHPO and the entity sponsoring the nomination informing them of the successful nomination of the district and the nomination materials will become available online via SHPO's website.

### **Do owners have a say?**

Historic districts require 51% owner consent. Letters are mailed by SHPO to every property owner in the proposed district with how to support or oppose the nomination of the historic district. Opposition must be sent in writing to SHPO. Every property owner receives only one 'vote' regardless of how many properties they own within the proposed district. Properties whose owners opposed the nomination are still included in the district. If there less than 51% of property owners consent, then the district fails. It may be resubmitted at a later date, but the approval, public meeting, owner consent process begins again.

### **What about public participation?**

There are multiple levels of participation in this process. At least one public meeting must be held with a representative of SHPO to discuss the project and answer questions. Mailings may be sent out to property owners with information about the nomination and how historic district listing affects their property.

The community may decide to do the nomination themselves if they feel they have the necessary skills and time set. This process is very onerous and is rarely taken on directly by the community. A consultant may be hired to do the reconnaissance level survey and/or nomination. Some consultants are willing to involve some volunteers or interns in data collection, photographing, etc., but every consultant is different. Some consultants may give progress updates that can be made available to the public at public meetings or via email or mailings to keep the community up to date on their research. It depends on the consultant and who the consultant is working for. Neighborhood associations and community groups may desire these sort of updates, but individuals or corporations may not.

Nominations are undertaken by community groups such as neighborhood associations, activist groups, historic preservation organizations like Historic Albany Foundation, Certified Local Governments (Albany is one), for profit entities such as developers.

### **How much does this cost?**

The cost depends on greatly the survey area. Reconnaissance level surveys typically run between \$4,000-10,000. Nominations are very dependent on size and if any research has been already completed (reconnaissance survey). A good rule of thumb is roughly \$50-100 per building.

### **Helpful Resources**

National Parks Service Website, [www.nps.gov/NR](http://www.nps.gov/NR)

State Historic Preservation Office, <http://www.nysparks.com/shpo/national-register/>