



Historic District Act Policy

The Historic District Act (“HDA”), Act 167 of 1961, P.L. 282, No. 167 as amended, 53 P.S. §8001 et. seq., is the enabling law that allows the governing bodies of Pennsylvania municipalities (excluding cities of the first and second class) to designate historic districts “for the purpose of protecting those historical areas within our great Commonwealth...”, under local ordinance and manage changes to the properties within those districts. The HDA requires the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (“PHMC”) to certify by resolution that the municipally defined district has historical significance before the ordinance may be implemented.

History:

- The [Pennsylvania Historic District Act](#) pre-dates the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.
- To date, PHMC has certified 158 historic districts under the Historic District Act. The last HDA district certified by PHMC was in 2018.
- Prior PHMC policy established a definition of historical district and certification criteria.
- The current Historic District Policy was adopted by the Commission on March 6, 2019.

PHMC has authority to issue policy necessary for the implementation of its powers and duties, 37 P.S. § 302(11). This policy update is intended to provide further guidance to municipalities that wish to create locally regulated historic districts under Pennsylvania’s Historic District Act.

1. Certification Request

- a. Prior to requesting certification of a historic district, the municipality may consult with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the proposed ordinance and district boundary.
- b. Following adoption of the ordinance establishing the historic district, the chief elected official of the municipality shall request certification in writing and submit the following information to PHMC for consideration:
 - i. documentation of the district’s boundaries and current physical condition in a form and manner as specified by the SHPO;
 - ii. a copy of the municipality’s adopted historic preservation ordinance, including designation criteria, and any adopted ordinances or amendments related to the boundaries of the district under consideration;
 - iii. an explanation of how the proposed district qualifies as historically significant according to the municipality’s own ordinance and criteria;
 - iv. an explanation of how the proposed district meets the PHMC’s policy’s definition of historic district; and
 - v. sufficient documentation to support the certification request and the municipality’s own designation criteria.
- c. PHMC, through the SHPO, may request additional information before rendering a decision regarding certification.

- 2. Definition of Historic District:** A historic district is an area that possesses a sufficient concentration, linkage, or continuity of buildings, structures, sites, objects, or open spaces united historically by plan or physical development.



- a. A district may comprise both distinctive features and features that lack individual distinction.
- b. A district may contain buildings, structures, sites, objects, or open spaces that do not necessarily contribute to the significance of the district.
- c. A district may include areas that act as a visual buffer to protect the character and significance of the historic district.

3. Criteria for Certification: In determining whether to certify the proposed historic district, PHMC will consider the following criteria and best practices:

- a. The proposed historic district meets the definition of an historic district as defined in this policy;
- b. The municipality's ordinance creating the district utilizes the municipality's own criteria for determining historical, architectural, or cultural significance of a historic district;
- c. The municipality's criteria for determining historical, architectural, or cultural significance is independent of National Register designation or State Historic Preservation Office eligibility determination;
- d. The municipality's criteria consider all historic and cultural resources equally; and
- e. The municipality provides sufficient documentation and justification applying its designation criteria.

This policy was last updated June 2024, by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.



LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT CERTIFICATION CHECKLIST

Please submit a completed and signed copy of this checklist along with all supporting materials ***via PA-SHARE*** at least 45 calendar days prior to a [regularly scheduled](#) Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission meeting. If the municipality is seeking certification of multiple districts, please submit a separate checklist for each district.

Following receipt of the certification request and supporting materials, PA SHPO staff will review the documentation and prepare a staff report for the Commission. The [Community Coordinator](#) for your region may contact you for additional information or clarification during that review period.

Municipality:

County:

Municipality Type:

Township

Borough

City

Historic District Name:

New designation

Expansion of previously certified boundary

Municipal staff contact:

Title:

Contact email:

Contact phone:

Chief Elected Official:

Title:

Street:

City:

State:

Zip:

This local historic district certification request has been prepared and submitted by:

Name

Position/Title

Date



New or updated survey data for the proposed district.

- Physical Description – describe the physical characteristics of the district and its resources. Include information about the district’s overall layout, form, and development patterns as well as descriptions of architectural styles, materials, and construction methods that characterize the district. Describe how the area meets the definition of a local historic district in the PHMC Local Historic District Certification Policy.
- Historical Narrative – briefly describe the history of the district, including key events, patterns persons, that make the district significant.
- Evaluation – describe how the district meets the designation criteria in the municipality’s historic preservation ordinance. Include a clear and concise statement of significance that relates to the designation criteria.
- Boundary Justification – describe how the designation of the district relates to the municipality’s comprehensive or preservation plan

A parcel map clearly showing the boundaries of the proposed district. The map must include the name of the proposed district, street names, north arrow, and date. GIS shapefiles of the district boundary and underlying parcels are also appreciated, if available.

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 to comprehensively illustrate the district as it appears today. The photographs must be keyed to a separate parcel map with the direction of the camera's view indicated. Photographs should be inserted into the narrative portions or included as a PDF attachment with no more than 2 photos per page. Please label each page with the name of the proposed district, county, municipality, and each photo with the photo number as it appears on the parcel map along with a caption.

An inventory or list of the properties within the designated district. The inventory must at a minimum include: the address and street name, and construction date of each property. The PA SHPO recommends that the inventory include additional property-level information that will be useful in administration of the ordinance and can provide guidance on gathering that information.

A copy of the adopted historic preservation ordinance including a parcel map and boundary description.

A copy of the applicable sections of the municipality's comprehensive plan that addresses historic resources and historic preservation or the municipality’s historic preservation plan.

A letter addressed to **Andrea MacDonald, Director, State Historic Preservation Office** signed 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 certification information must be submitted via [PA SHARE](#). The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission will review all submitted materials at a regularly scheduled meeting, and PA SHPO staff will notify the local government of the Commission’s official action. The historic district ordinance may not be enforced until the historic district is certified by resolution of the PHMC.