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# 10 Benefits of Establishing a Local Historic District

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By:

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So you've decided you want to establish a local historic district and have considered where its boundaries should be [[Link: /10-on-tuesday-10-factors-in-establishing-local-historic-district-boundary-lines/](/10-on-tuesday-10-factors-in-establishing-local-historic-district-boundary-lines/)]. Now comes perhaps the hardest part: getting your community to buy into the idea.

Shaping local sentiment and opinions is a complex task, and planning a local historic district is no exception. While the preservation community understands and appreciates its benefits, it's not guaranteed everybody will feel as enthusiastic about it. What's more, all the local stakeholders—homeowners, government officials, merchants, and property owners—will endorse, change, or reject proposals depending on how well they understand the issues involved.

So it's up to the district advocates to make a clear and compelling case for the advantages of a local historic district. Not only will it increase community awareness,

but it can also help avoid controversy later by building consensus now.

Here are 10 points to share with your community stakeholders that outline the benefits of establishing a local historic district in your area.

**1. Local districts protect the investments of owners and residents of historic properties.**

Insensitive or poorly planned development can make an area less attractive to investors and homebuyers, and thus undermine property value. In contrast, historic district designation encourages people to buy and rehabilitate properties because they know their investment is protected over time.

**2. Properties within local historic districts appreciate at rates greater than the local market overall as well as faster than similar, non-designated neighborhoods.**

Findings on this point are consistent across the country. Moreover, recent analysis shows that historic districts are also less vulnerable to market volatility from interest rate fluctuations and economic downturns.

**3. Local districts encourage better quality design.** In this case, better design equals a greater sense of cohesiveness, more innovative use of materials, and greater public appeal—all of which are shown to occur more often within designated districts than non-designated ones.



Española Way in Miami's South Beach.

**4. Local districts help the environment.** Historic districts encourage communities to retain and use their existing resources in established neighborhoods. This reduces the need for cars, cuts back on pollution and congestion, and eliminates landfill waste.

**5. Local districts are energy-efficient.** Many older buildings were designed with energy conservation in mind, taking advantage of natural light, cross-ventilation, and climate-appropriate materials. Preservation commissions are also increasingly improving their design guidelines to make it easier for historic building owners to use renewable-energy technologies.

**6. Historic districts are a vehicle for education.** They are a tangible link to the past and a way to bring meaning to history and to people's lives. They preserve the original character of buildings and streets, while welcoming growth and innovation within those spaces. They are a living, active record of communities and their residents.



**7. Historic districts can positively impact the local economy through tourism.** An aesthetically cohesive and well-promoted district can be a community's most important attraction. According to a 2009 report, 78% of all U.S. leisure travelers are cultural and/or heritage travelers who spent, on average, \$994 on their most recent trips—compared to \$611 spent by non-cultural and heritage travelers.



Main Street, Chillicothe, Ohio

**8. Protecting local historic districts can enhance business recruitment potential.** Vibrant commercial cores and charming neighborhoods with character attract new business and quality industry. Companies continually relocate to communities that offer their workers a higher quality of life, which successful preservation programs and stable districts enhance.

**9. Local districts provide social and psychological benefits.** People living in historic districts enjoy the comfort of a human-scale environment (a mix of aesthetics and functionality that fit the average person's dimensions and capabilities); the opportunity to live and work in attractive surroundings; a recognizable and walkable

neighborhood; and the galvanizing effect of community-based group action.

**10. Local districts give communities a voice in their future.** By participating in the designation process, citizens can help direct their communities' path. Making these decisions together in a structured way—rather than behind closed doors or without public comment—gives everyone involved a sense of empowerment and confidence.

The better you can articulate the benefits of a local historic district, the more easily you'll attract and retain supporters.



Julia Rocchi was the senior director of digital marketing at the National Trust. By day she wrangles content; by night (and weekends), she shops local, travels to story-rich places, and gawks at buildings.