



# Just the FAQs, please!

Overview of the proposed Historic Overlay District  
Ordinance for the City of Erie

## **Q: What is a Historic Overlay Ordinance?**

**A:** The purpose of the ordinance is to protect and preserve historical areas of the City of Erie and individual structures and sites within this area that are historically, architecturally or culturally significant. It is also intended to ensure that new development or redevelopment of lots within the Historic Overlay District is compatible with the character of the District.

*Land use and building regulations are often delegated by States to municipalities in the form of enabling legislation – laws that allow (and sometimes require) municipalities to enact ordinances related to planning, zoning, and construction codes. In Pennsylvania there are two enabling laws that allow municipalities to enact historic preservation ordinances. The one we propose using is the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The MPC is the compilation of all of the planning and zoning authorities and requirements delegated to municipalities. Among these authorizations is the ability to classify properties “having unique historical, architectural or patriotic value” and to enact regulations for their protection and enhancement.*

## **Q: Why is it important that the City create Historic Overlay District(s)?**

**A:** As the adage goes – all preservation is local. While federal and state programs and policies are undeniably important, historic resources are most appreciated and hence preserved at the local level. And, while the restrictions of the Historic Overlay District Ordinance are primarily meant to protect our community’s heritage, help spur tourism, generate new investment in otherwise forgotten areas, and increase local tax revenue and property values, it will also protect homes and businesses against the devaluing effects of unsightly or inappropriate development on nearby properties.

## **Q: Which properties are you proposing be included in the Historic Overlay District(s)?**

**A:** As a starting point, we are proposing that Historic Overlay Districts be created for the four National Register Districts located within the City of Erie. They include the West 6th Street Historic District, West 21st Street Historic District, and West Park Place.

**Q: What types of actions will require review by the Design Review Committee?**

**A:** This law will protect historic properties within the designated District(s) through a permitting process that requires advance review of proposed projects by an administrative body, or, in our case, the Design Review Committee (advisory) and Zoning Officer (decision-maker). Alterations, additions, rehabilitation, or reconstruction of a historic property within the District(s) and visible from a public right of way will trigger the review process. No permit will be required for interior work, exterior painting, or in-kind replacement of building materials.

The proposed ordinance also outlines the review process for issuance of demolition permits for historic properties within the District(s), and provides design guidelines for new construction so that new structures fit with the character of the District(s).

**Q: How will the ordinance protect historic properties within the District(s) from being demolished?**

**A:** The law authorizes demolition of historic properties only in cases where retention of the structure will cause an extreme burden on the property owner and the resource cannot be rehabilitated or sold or the property poses a safety threat after a fire or other type of natural disaster.

**Q: What does the application and review process look like?**

**A:** Property owners will be required to submit complete applications to the Zoning Officer. Applications will include: (1) a written description of the proposed alteration, addition, reconstruction or rehabilitation; and, where applicable (2) a site plan at a scale designated by the Zoning Officer; (3) schematic architectural drawings of the proposed construction or alterations; (4) materials list and disposition of existing materials. Once an application is received, the Design Review Committee has 30 days to meet and review the application, and 15 days following the meeting to provide a recommendation to the Zoning Officer. The Zoning Officer then responds accordingly.

**Q: What standards of review will be used to guide the Design Review Committee's in making permit recommendations?**

**A:** We propose using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation to guide the Design Review Committee in reviewing permit applications, which are general in nature. For example, the Secretary's standards provide that "deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired, wherever possible," and "in the event that replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities."