



### LOCAL, STATE OR NATIONAL REGISTER DESIGNATION:

Property may be designated at only one level or all three. Each level offers its own incentives, rewards, and challenges. For properties in Athens-Clarke County, local designation means that protective measures are in place to review changes for their appropriateness and compatibility. This is the Certificate of Appropriateness process. Another aspect of local designation, in tandem with a state or national designation, is the potential to qualify for the Historic Property Tax Freeze. Property designation as historic is possible on the National, State, and Local levels.

National designation means that a property, site, or district is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. National Register listing does not place obligations on private property owners to rehab structures, nor does it require any review of renovation or new construction on the property. Various grants or tax incentives may be possible for projects at listed sites depending on the project and available monies at that time.

State level designation means that a property is listed in the Georgia Register of Historic Places. The Georgia Register uses the same criteria and documentation procedures as the National Register of Historic Places. Properties listed in the National Register are automatically listed in the Georgia Register.

### Local Designation Criteria:

Historic Districts and Landmarks have certain designation criteria that must be met for them to qualify for designation. The criteria can be found in Section 8-5-3 of the ACC Code of Ordinances. In summary, the following characteristics define each:

**Districts** – A definable geographic area where properties contain special character, historic interest or representative architecture.

**Landmarks** – Usually a single parcel or building. Landmarks need to be an outstanding example of its type, one of few remaining examples, associated with an important person or event, or of a natural or aesthetic quality that contributes to the local culture or heritage.

**For more information, contact the ...**

**Athens-Clarke County Planning Department**

120 W. Dougherty Street Athens, GA 30601

706-613-3515 [www.accgov.com/planning](http://www.accgov.com/planning)

# Historic District Designation

**This brochure seeks to share basic insights about the historic designation process and what the impact might be for property owners and residents, if approved.**



The historic, cultural, and aesthetic heritage of Athens-Clarke County (ACC) is among its most valued and important assets. Protection, support, and promotion of this heritage benefits the entire community. The most effective means of offering this protection is through historic designation of districts and landmarks. This protection was first authorized by the City of Athens in 1988 and continued after unification in 1990.

Local historic designation follows the state mandated process administered by the ACC Historic Preservation Commission with approval from the Mayor and ACC Commission. The process includes multiple opportunities for impacted property owners and other concerned parties to learn about designation requests and offer comments. While the designation doesn't legally require owner approval, the input from property owners and community is highly valued and a critical part of the designation process.

## Summary of the Designation Process

1. Submission of a Study List Application by a property owner, or neighborhood association for a specific landmark or district to be considered.
2. The Designation Committee of the Historic Preservation Commission discusses the potential for designation. Clear potential to qualify for designation is needed to continue the process.
3. Working with the ACC Commissioner for the area to garner support from property owners for the concept of designation is highly encouraged at this point before proceeding.
4. The history of the area is thoroughly researched and analyzed including architectural surveys for each property or building. This work is best accomplished by a professional or experienced individual. The funding for this work is the responsibility of those seeking designation unless specific funding and authorization is provided by the Mayor and Commission to the Planning Department.
5. The designation report and architectural survey drafts are reviewed by the Designation Committee for completeness and boundaries for the designation are drafted based on the findings.
6. An open house is held to allow for public review and comment on the proposed designation. Any necessary revisions or additional research needed would follow.
7. The proposed designation is reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission at a public hearing to offer a recommendation to the Mayor and ACC Commission.
8. The Mayor and Commission hold a public hearing to make a final determination on the proposed designation. If approved, the designation means that the protections of designation, including the need for obtaining Certificates of Appropriateness, are in place.

### Benefits of Designation:

- Enhances neighborhood design;
- Ensures thoughtful and sensitive project planning;
- Stabilizes property values;
- Protects investment with upkeep and improvements;
- Enables community input on projects in the district;
- Gives peace of mind that project review will occur;
- Offers potential tax assessment value freeze for qualifying properties.

**Certificates of Appropriateness:** Historic designation requires review of exterior changes to ensure that the very character being lauded is retained. The application for these exterior changes is a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). This review certifies that the changes proposed are appropriate. Design Guidelines are used to guide the designer planning a change and the HPC members or staff doing the review. The Design Guidelines used may be a separate document specific to a district or are the general set that includes a summary of the special character of a district or landmark. COA Requests with less potential impact on historic character are reviewed by staff, while those with more potential impact go before the Historic Preservation Commission at a public hearing. Application deadlines and fees vary with the type of project.



### The Historic Property Tax Incentive

is often referred to as the tax freeze for qualifying properties. The value is frozen at the assessed value on file at the time the tax incentive application is processed. Some important information to know:

- The property must be considered contributing to the local and state or national designations.
- Residential property must conform with local zoning.
- This tax benefit may be sequential with other benefits such as the State Rehabilitation Act, but may not be received simultaneously.
- Value assessments will continue to be made during a freeze period and any dispute of those amounts must be made at that time rather than when the freeze has ended.
- While the property assessed value on which the taxes are based will be frozen, the millage rate is not - so the actual annual tax bills paid may vary.
- The tax incentive is only available once per qualifying property. It will transfer with the property, should ownership change.