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# What is the National Register of Historic Places and how is it different from the City's Historic Preservation Commission and Local Landmark Designation?

## An Explanation of the Differences Between the Federal Designation Process and the Local Designation Process

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### Introduction

In Lake Forest, there are two types of historic designations for properties, structures, objects, sites or districts: federal designation and local designation. At the federal level, properties may be listed individually or as a District in the National Register of Historic Places. Listing on the National Register is purely an honorary designation that imposes no restrictions on property owners. At the local level, properties may be designated as a Local Historic Landmark or District by the City's Historic Preservation Commission and City Council. Designation at the federal and local levels are two mutually exclusive processes, in other words, a property or district that is designated to the National Register of Historic Places is not required to be designated as a Local Landmark and a designated Local Landmark does not require listing in the National Register.

Although they are very different in their intent, powers and benefits, the two types of designations are sometimes confused. The purpose of this pamphlet is to demystify and answer some of the most frequently asked questions about both processes.

### Who operates the designation process?

#### *Federal Level*

The National Register of Historic Place is a federal program established by Congress, which operates under the auspices of the National Park Service branch of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The program has been in existence since 1966 and is administered in Illinois by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA). Nominations for listing on the National Register are submitted directly to IHPA and applications work with IHPA staff to ensure that a nomination is complete and accurate.

#### *Local Level*

At the local level, Local Landmark nominations are reviewed by The City of Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission, a municipal board established by the Lake Forest City Council in 1998. The Commission is made up of seven Lake Forest residents who are appointed by the Mayor, with the approval of the City Council. The Commission is responsible for carrying on the long tradition of Lake Forest by preserving historic buildings, gardens, and streetscapes, as well as the overall historic character of the community. In addition to reviewing Landmark Nominations, the Commission reviews projects affecting the exterior architectural appearance of any property within the City's locally designated Historic Districts or any individual Local Landmark designated property throughout the City. The Commission reviews proposals for complete

and partial demolitions and requests for Building Scale variances. The Commission is also responsible for reviewing and evaluating the design and compatibility of new buildings, replacement structures as a result of demolition, and building additions and alterations. When the Commission approves a project, a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued indicating review and authorization for a permit.

### What is the purpose of the designation?

#### *Federal Level*

The National Register is the official list of the country's cultural properties worthy of preservation. It is a part of a nationwide effort to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect cultural resources. It does this primarily by recognizing properties, making special financial incentives available to encourage their restoration or adaptive reuse, and offering limited protection from the harmful effects of federally assisted projects. One common example of this protection is ensuring that state or federally funded highway projects do not negatively affect a property or district listed in the National Register.

#### *Local Level*

The Local Register of Historic Landmarks is the City's official list of properties that have been nominated and designated as Local Landmarks within the City. The Historic Preservation Commission seeks to identify properties that are important to the cultural history of the City of Lake Forest and protect them from demolition or insensitive alterations. It does this by reviewing nominations that are submitted to them for Landmark designation and forwarding a recommendation to the City Council.

### What are the criteria for designation?

#### *Federal Level*

To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, a site, structure or district can be located anywhere in the nation and must be of significance to American history, architecture, archeology or culture. It should possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. A property is considered to be of historic cultural significance if it meets at least one of the following criteria:

- A. is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern 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 a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- D. has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they qualify otherwise as exceptions.

*Local Level*

To be eligible for Local Landmark designation by the Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission, a property must be located in the City of Lake Forest and must be of historic, architectural, or cultural significance. A property is considered to be of significance if it retains integrity of location, design, material, workmanship, and association and meets at least one of the following criteria:

- A. Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;
- B. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Lake Forest, the State of Illinois, the Midwest region, or the United States;
- C. Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or overall quality of design or detail;
- D. Its representation of an historic, cultural, architectural, archaeological or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, structures, sites or objects that may or may not be contiguous;
- E. Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, of the City of Lake Forest;
- F. Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City of Lake Forest, whose components may lack individual distinction.
- G. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the historic, cultural, architectural, archaeological or related aspect of the development of the City of Lake Forest, State of Illinois, Midwest region, of the United States;
- H. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Lake Forest, the State of Illinois, the Midwest region, of the United States;
- I. Its location as a site of important archaeological or natural significance;

- J Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity which may or may not have taken place within or involved the use of any existing improvements on the property.

**How are properties designated?**

*Federal Level*

Anyone can nominate a property to the National Register of Historic Places by submitting an application to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). In Illinois, the SHPO is the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency located in Springfield. After review by the staff, the nomination is presented to a review board, which decides whether or not to forward the property to the National Register of Historic Places in Washington D.C. for further consideration. The Keeper of the National Register reviews the application and makes the final decision as to whether or not the property will be listed.

*Local Level*

For Local Landmark designation, any owner of record of the property being nominated, a member of the Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission, or a simple majority of the City Council may initiate the nomination of a property for consideration by the Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission. A Local Landmark nomination form must be completed and returned to the Community Development Department. The staff will then forward the nomination to the Historic Preservation Commission for consideration at a public hearing. If the Commission determines that the property is eligible for Landmark designation, the Commission's recommendation will be forwarded to the City Council for final approval. The nomination form has been designed to create a relatively simple local designation process. A property owner applying for both Local and National Register designation can submit to the City a simplified Local Landmark nomination form along with a copy of the completed National Register nomination form.

**What are the benefits of designation?**

*Federal Level*

Listing in the National Register of Historic Places is primarily an honorary designation. When a property is listed in the National Register, it becomes eligible for favorable income tax treatments and property tax treatments, such as the Façade Easement Program offered by the Landmarks Illinois (additional information can be obtained from Landmarks Illinois at 312- 922-1742, or on their website, [www.landmarks.org](http://www.landmarks.org)), or the Tax Freeze Program administered by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

The Tax Freeze Program provides tax incentives to owner-occupants of historic residences who rehabilitate their homes. Through the Property Tax Assessment Freeze Program the assessed valuation of the historic property is frozen for eight years at the pre-rehabilitation level. The valuation then is brought back to market level over a period of four years, effectively giving the property owner 11 years of reduced taxes.

### *Local Level*

A principle benefit of Local Landmark designation by the Lake Forest Historic Preservation Commission is the degree of protection it affords a property from demolition or harmful alteration. This does not mean that the Commission prohibits change. Rather, the Commission works with property owners to ensure that key characteristics and character defining elements that make a property unique or significant are preserved, and that new additions are architecturally compatible with the original structure.

Properties that are designated at the local level, either individually or as part of a local Historic District, are also eligible for the Property Tax Freeze Program described above.

### **What restrictions are placed on designated properties?**

This is the most common point of confusion. The City's Historic Preservation Commission only reviews requests for demolition or alterations involving properties that have been designated as Local Historic Landmarks or Districts. Regardless of whether a property has historical significance, unless it has been designated at the local level it does not fall under the purview of the Historic Preservation Commission and the Historic Preservation Ordinance. This is true even for properties been listed in the National Register, unless they have also been locally designated they do not all under the review of the Commission. Instead, these properties, like all other properties in town, fall under the purview of the City's Building Review Board.

For those properties that are locally designated, interior work requires a building permit but does not require the Historic Preservation Commission's approval. The Commission's primary role is to prevent the demolition or insensitive alteration of locally designated structures.

As noted above, listing in the National Register of Historic Places is primarily an honorary designation that imposes no additional restrictions on a property. Approval from the National Register or federal government is not required to demolish or alter a federally designated property and a property listed in the National Register does not have to be made available for public inspection.

### **Applying to the National Register or for Local Landmark Designation**

For additional information about designating a property or district to the National Register, or to find out if your property is eligible for listing in the National Register, please contact the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency at:

**Illinois Historic Preservation Agency  
Preservation Services  
#1 Old State Capitol Plaza  
Springfield IL 62701-1507  
Phone (217) 785-4512  
8 a.m. and 5 p.m. CST, Monday-Friday**

Applications for Local Landmark or Local Historic District designation are available for download on the City of Lake Forest Community Development Department web site, [www.cityoflakeforest.com](http://www.cityoflakeforest.com), or can be picked up at the Community Development Department, 800 Field Drive. If you have questions or need further information on this topic, please contact Planning staff at:

**Community Development Department  
800 Field Drive  
Lake Forest, IL 60045  
Phone (847) 810-3520  
Fax (847) 615-4383**