



East Orleans Main Street Historic District Study Committee
19 School Street, Orleans, MA 02653

Local Historic Districts - Frequently Asked Questions

How is a local historic district created?

The first step was taken when the Select Board appointed an Historic District Study Committee. This committee is investigating local historic district designation along Main Street in East Orleans. The study committee has begun holding public meetings, seeking public input, researching the history of the area, and preparing a report on their findings. The final step, if there is sufficient community support, is bringing a proposed historic district bylaw to town meeting for a vote, for which a two-thirds majority is required.

If my building is included in the local historic district, does that mean I have to make it look more historic?

No, you can maintain the current look of your building as long as you would like. The proposed local historic district would only reviews additions, demolitions and new construction. Routine maintenance and other alterations would be exempt from review.

Does this mean I can paint my building any color I want?

Yes. While some local historic districts in Massachusetts do include paint color review, we are looking to adopt a less regulated district, and paint color would be one of the many features not subject to review.

What kinds of things are reviewed by a historic district commission?

Review would be limited to additions, demolition, and new construction. Interior changes, landscaping, maintenance and exterior features not visible from a public way are not reviewed.

Who are members of the historic district commission?

The historic district bylaw would describe specifically how the Select Board would make appointees to the Historic District Commission. In most communities in Massachusetts, the historic district commission consists of members such as architects, realtors, historians, residents and property owners of the district.

Isn't this just another level of bureaucracy?

While it is true that an additional step is needed for some projects, the benefits of protecting the rich architectural heritage found along Main Street in East Orleans outweigh this added step. Main Street contains historically and architecturally significant buildings that date from the early-19th into the 20th century. Without a local historic district, these gems that have lasted so long could be demolished or irreparably altered tomorrow.

What will happen to the value of my property if a local historic district is established?

No one can predict the future, but studies around the country have shown that property values track along with general price trends or increase faster in local historic districts compared to similar, non-designated areas.

If my neighbors and I already maintain the historic character of our properties, why do we need an historic district?

By having a local historic district, you can be assured that a new property owner across the street from your house will also maintain the historic character of Main Street in East Orleans.