



**CITY OF GENEVA  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
22 S. FIRST STREET  
GENEVA, ILLINOIS 60134**

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## **A GUIDE TO THE LOCAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION PROCESS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Geneva is a residential community characterized by fine examples of many significant architectural styles dating from the mid-1800s to the present. Excellent examples of Greek Revival, Italianate and Upright and Wing stand side-by-side with Prairie School, and vernacular riverstone buildings. Some are very large; others are quite modest. But all contribute to the rich fabric of Geneva architecture, which illustrates not a single period of outstanding significance, but a broad overview of the development of architectural styles.

In 1982, the City Council passed the Geneva Historic Preservation Ordinance which was amended in 1988, 1994 and 1995. The ordinance established the Historic Preservation Commission and identified that the Commission's purpose was "to promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the community by protecting the City's heritage."

This overview of the landmarks / historic district designation process is not intended to be a substitute for the process as outlined Title 10, Chapter 6: Historic Preservation of the City of Geneva's code. The City's Municipal Code may be found online at:

[http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientId=14841&stateId=13&stateName=Illinois?infobase=14841&doc\\_action=whatsnew](http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientId=14841&stateId=13&stateName=Illinois?infobase=14841&doc_action=whatsnew)

### **WHAT IS THE GENEVA HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE?**

The Geneva Historic Preservation Ordinance provides a mechanism to identify and preserve the distinctive historic, architectural and/or landscaping features of Geneva that represent the City's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history. By encouraging preservation, rehabilitation and restoration, the City fosters civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past as represented in Geneva's landmarks and historic district.

### **WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF THE GENEVA HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE?**

Preservation efforts enhance the attractiveness of the City to its residents, home buyers, tourists, visitors and shoppers, and thereby support and promote business, and provide economic benefits to the City.

### **WHAT IS THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION?**

The Preservation Ordinance established the Historic Preservation Commission in 1982. The Commission is composed of seven citizens appointed by the Mayor and City Council. Appointed Commissioners possess a demonstrated interest, knowledge, ability, experience, and expertise in architectural restoration, rehabilitation, and local history.

### **WHAT DOES THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DO?**

The Commission meets at City Hall on the third Tuesday of each month to carry out its responsibilities, which include making recommendations to the City Council on preservation issues, identification of landmark buildings and districts, and review of permit applications for exterior alterations to historic properties.

The Commission also presents a variety of public awareness programs including walking tours of historic districts, a bi-annual preservation awards program, and activities to celebrate National Preservation Month. These activities inform and educate residents on the importance of preserving Geneva's historic resources.



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**WHAT IS A CITY OF GENEVA LOCAL LANDMARK / HISTORIC DISTRICT?**

The City of Geneva is empowered by ordinance to designate objects, structures, buildings, districts and sites as local landmarks if they have aesthetic, architectural, cultural and/or historic value. Geneva's local landmark and historic district designation affords properties more protection than is possible through state or national landmarking programs. Once a property is locally designated (as an individual landmark or as part of a historic district), any exterior alteration, construction, demolition or removal that requires a building permit to be completed is reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission. The review process is handled in a timely fashion and careful consideration is given to the owner's request. The Commission serves as a resource for owners of historic properties. Additionally, property owners can rely on the Commission's technical expertise to aid them in developing rehabilitation plans.

**WHAT IS THE CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION OF HISTORIC LANDMARKS?**

The Historic Preservation Commission shall not recommend nor shall the City Council grant a designation of a landmark unless an individual property meets the following requirements:

1. Located within the corporate boundaries of the City of Geneva; and
2. Thirty (30) years old or older, in whole or in part; and
3. One of more of the following conditions exists:
  - a. the property may identify with an historic personage or with important events in national, state, or local history; and/or
  - b. the property may embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; and/or
  - c. the property may represent the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influences an era; and/or
  - d. the property may be an improvement embodying all or part of the above characteristics, which is subject to encroachment of detrimental influences; and/or
  - e. the property may be an improvement of historic, architectural, or cultural significance which is threatened with demolition by public or private action.
4. Possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling and association; and
5. Embodies such other qualities and characteristics that, in the judgment of the HPC, make it eligible for designation as a landmark.

**WHAT IS THE CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS?**

The Historic Preservation Commission shall not recommend nor shall the City Council grant a designation of a historic district unless the proposed geographically-bounded group of properties meets the following requirements:

1. Located within the corporate boundaries of the City; and
2. Possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association; and
3. One or more of the following conditions exists:
  - a. the proposed area may exemplify the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the national, state or community; and/or
  - b. the proposed area may identify with an historic personage or with important events in national, State, or local history; and/or
  - c. the proposed area may embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; and/or
  - d. the proposed area may represent the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influences an era; and/or
  - e. the proposed area embodies some degree of architectural or land use characteristics in a manner which distinguishes the proposed area from other areas within the City; and/or
  - f. the proposed area embodies such other qualities and characteristics as in the judgment of the Commission should be considered for the designation of an historic preservation district.



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**LANDMARK AND HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION PROCESS**

**Step 1 - Nomination & Support Information**

In order to nominate a property (or a group of properties as in a historic district) for designation as a City of Geneva Landmark / historic district, a member of the Commission, property owner or interested party must complete a simple nomination form and provide support information describing how the landmark or district meets the criteria. For a proposed historic district, an applicant must also submit a map indicating the boundary of the proposed district.

Forms are available online or from the Preservation Planner in the Department of Community Development. Please contact Michael Lambert, at (630) 938-4541 or [mlambert@geneva.il.us](mailto:mlambert@geneva.il.us) for assistance in completing this landmark nomination form. A preliminary meeting with the Preservation Planner is recommended prior to the submission of a nomination form. All costs incurred by the nomination process are the applicant's responsibility.

**Step 2 – Notification**

If the landmark / historic district nomination application is determined to be complete, the applicant will provide addressed/stamped letters to be sent, *via certified mail*. In the case of a landmark nomination, notice shall be sent to the owner/owners of record of the nominated property as well as those owners of any property within 250' of the nominated property. In the case of a historic district, notice shall be sent to the owner/owners of record of all properties within the proposed district boundaries.

**Step 3 – Public Hearing**

A public hearing will be held within 60 days of the application's submittal. The public hearing will be held at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission. Notice of the hearing must be published at least 15 days prior to the hearing, but not more than 30 days prior to the hearing.

The purpose of the public hearing is to gather facts and testimony that will assist the Historic Preservation Commission in reaching a decision to recommend or not recommend the designation. All interested parties are encouraged to attend and their testimony will be heard by the Commission. Upon review and discussion, a favorable recommendation by the Historic Preservation Commission is, then, forwarded to the City Council for review and official action.

**Step 4 – City Council Action**

If the Historic Preservation Commission recommends approval, then the nomination moves to the City Council for review. The City Council must review nomination applications within 120 days of submittal. If the City Council approves the nomination of a property or district, then the property or properties is/are designated by ordinance.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF OWNING A CITY OF GENEVA LANDMARK?**

Geneva landmarks receive community-wide recognition and protection under the Preservation Ordinance. A considerable amount of scientific, university research has focused on the question of historic designation and community benefits derived from the designation of landmarks and historic districts. Among the documented benefits are demonstrated enhancement of economic development, employment, tourism, neighborhood stability and property values.



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Because Geneva's Historic Preservation Ordinance is certified by the Illinois State Historic Preservation office, owners of properties designated as "historic" may be eligible for tax benefits. State legislation provides an eight year property tax assessment freeze for owners of single family residences that are substantially rehabilitated in accordance with the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. For more information on the Property Tax Assessment Freeze Program, please call the Local Government Services Coordinator at the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency at (217) 785-4512 or visit their website: <http://www.illinoishistory.gov/PS/taxfreeze.htm>

Additionally, historically-certified structures (identified through a review process such as the process established by the City of Geneva) may qualify for relief from strict compliance with the 2012 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC), required for new construction and alterations of existing construction. Review of the specific provisions of the 2012 IECC and consultation with a design professional or the City of Geneva Building Official are recommended prior to undertaking any project which may be subject to compliance with the 2012 IECC.

Other programs and incentives may be available for qualified historic structures. Please contact the City of Geneva Preservation Planner for additional information.

**CAN ALTERATION, CONSTRUCTION, OR DEMOLITION OF A DESIGNATED LANDMARK OCCUR?**

Once a site or structure has been designated as a local landmark, the property is subject to Commission review for exterior alterations, construction or demolition plans requiring a building permit. Generally, building permits are required for any action other than basic property maintenance and upkeep. This review process is an effective way to protect and preserve Geneva's historical and architectural heritage and provides an excellent opportunity for property owners to receive technical advice from the Commission that may enhance the proposed plans or alterations.

**WHAT IS COMMISSION REVIEW?**

Applications for building permits for exterior improvements and/or alterations to historic properties are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission. Applications are submitted to the Preservation Planner or the Building Department.

The Commission reviews the proposed improvements and/or alterations for their compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (SOI Standards). For more information about the SOI Standards, please consult [http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/rehab/rehab\\_standards.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/rehab/rehab_standards.htm) for the Standards and additional information.

In some cases, certain applications for exterior improvements may be reviewed administratively by the Preservation Planner on behalf of the Historic Preservation Commission, thereby eliminating an appearance before the monthly Commission meeting by an applicant seeking to complete minor, exterior work within a historic district or at an individual landmark property.

**WHAT IS NOT INVOLVED ONCE GRANTED LANDMARK STATUS?**

Designation of an individual property as a landmark or a group of properties as a historic district

**does not require** property owners to restore a property;

**does not require** property owners to make improvements or alterations to a property;

**does not require** owners to purchase or install plaques identifying a property as a historic site;

**does not require** specific paint colors;

**does not regulate** any interior improvements; and

**does not otherwise control or limit** the use of a property.



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**DOES THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION PROVIDE PLAQUES FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS?**

Within the City of Geneva, a plaque solely provides recognition that a property has historical and/or architectural significance. The local plaque program is sponsored by the Geneva History Center, a not-for-profit organization that is distinct from the City of Geneva and the City's landmark or historic district designation process. To be considered for recognition with a plaque, property owners should contact the Geneva History Center at 630/232-4951.

Although a building may have a plaque, this recognition does not denote that any specific regulations apply to that building. City-designated historic buildings may or may not be recognized with a Geneva History Center plaque.

When contemplating any work that may be subject to a building permit, it is essential to determine if your property has been designated a City of Geneva Landmark or lies within a designated City of Geneva Historic District. Exterior improvements of designated historic properties are subject to review by the Historic Preservation Commission.

**MORE QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT US**

Michael Lambert, Preservation Planner  
630/938-4541  
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