

# TCRPC

## Planning Toolkit Fact Sheet



### INTRODUCTION

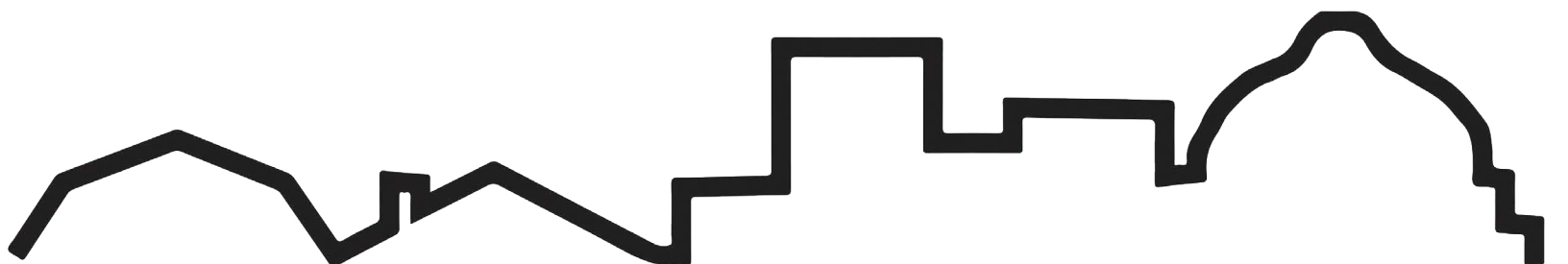
Historic resources are community assets – they provide a community with a link to its heritage, promote a sense of community cohesion and can enhance property values. Several techniques exist for historic preservation of individual resources or whole neighborhoods within municipalities. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) publication “**Historic District Designation in Pennsylvania**” (2007) examines some of the options and gives practical tips on pursuing different strategies.

Creating a historic district is one way to ensure that development of new buildings and rehabilitation of old structures support the character of the area. Since 1961, Pennsylvania’s Historic District Act (Act 167) has enabled municipalities (including counties) to identify geographically bounded areas with unique or important historical value as Historic Districts. Municipalities should coordinate with PHMC in designating the boundaries of a historic district and developing an ordinance that can then be certified by PHMC once adopted and enforced by the municipality. The ordinance establishes a Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB); this is an appointed quasi-judicial panel that reviews development, demolition and building modification applications in order to ensure compliance with a set of adopted design standards, also typically included in the ordinance. These design standards are intended to preserve the architectural integrity and authenticity of a building’s character-defining features and to help the municipality assess the “appropriateness” of alterations and new construction within the context of the historic district.

Another way to protect historic resources is through the Municipalities Planning Code. Municipalities with zoning can adopt a Historic Overlay Zoning District which permits uses compatible with the historic nature of the area.

Some likewise adopt a list of historic properties that are individually regulated using the overlay concept. Most current zoning overlay ordinances establish a process to review the demolition of historic buildings, and many include design standards for new construction at those sites. In some instances, municipalities further define rehabilitation standards to be used when adapting a historic building for a new use. Overlays also offer the opportunity to provide incentives, such as density bonuses and relief from off-street parking requirements. Also, subdivision and land development ordinances can provide lot layouts and other design standards meant to preserve the community’s traditional neighborhood character or rural setting. It should be noted that Act 167 provisions tend to establish a design review process for buildings while MPC regulations tend to regulate demolition, lot layout and use; however, it is recommended that a municipality with zoning that adopts a Historic District also identify how zoning ordinances should change to meet preservation goals.

Historic preservation planning is required as part of county comprehensive plans, as dictated by the MPC. Local municipalities are likewise encouraged to explore whether or not an historic preservation plan is useful in their communities, either as an element of their comprehensive plan, or as a standalone document. An historic preservation plan should include an inventory or survey of current resources, a community vision to prioritize preservation activities and an implementation plan to direct future policy. Optimally, historic preservation activities, such as the drafting and adoption of a Historic District, would be the result of an historic preservation plan.



## BENEFITS

- Preserves historic structures and resources
- Helps focus development in areas with existing infrastructure
- Connects citizens with their community heritage
- Attracts visitors and new investment by maintaining the character of historic neighborhoods
- Stabilizes and, in many instances, increases neighborhood property values
- Spurs additional development

## DRAWBACKS

- Can be perceived as over-regulation or a limit to property rights
- Additional application and review process can add an extra layer of red-tape to development
- Historic preservation goals may be at odds with other municipal goals

## PRACTICAL TIPS

- Engage land owners in proposed districts early in the process
- Contact the Pennsylvania **State Historic Preservation Office** for technical assistance with defining local historic districts and drafting an ordinance
- Begin with a historic preservation plan to identify priorities



## RESOURCES

### Examples

- **Boiling Springs Historic District, Cumberland County**
- **Shippensburg Historic District, Cumberland County**
- **Newport Historic District, Perry County**
- **Little Buffalo Historic District, Perry County**
- **Fort Hunter Historic District, Dauphin County**
- **Old Midtown Historic District – Harrisburg, Dauphin County**

### Tools

- **Historic District Designations in PA**
- **Municipalities Planning Code**
- **National Register of Historic Places**
- **Preservation Pennsylvania - A Statewide Voice for Pennsylvania's Heritage.**

## RELATED TOOLKIT FACT SHEETS

- **Traditional Zoning Ordinances**
- **Form Based Codes**

