

Preservation Commissions

EVERY INDIANA COMMUNITY HAS A POWERFUL revitalization tool at its disposal: local landmark and historic district designation protects the visual character of individual structures and entire residential and commercial areas, boosts property values and encourages investment, and ensures long-term protection. If the advantages sound attractive, read on!

Let's start with a common misconception

National Register listing does not protect a structure from demolition. An owner using private funds can alter or even demolish a historic property.

And a couple of important definitions

National Register district: A geographic area listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the federal roster of significant historic sites and districts maintained by the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Local historic district: A geographic area—which can range in size from a single home to many blocks—whose historic buildings are protected by a local historic preservation commission through a design review process.

Contrary to popular belief, listing in the National Register confers honor but it does not guarantee protection against demolition or restrict changes made by private property owners.

In the event of a threat, National Register status may garner a landmark attention from media and elected officials, but its limited protection kicks in only when federal funds are used in a manner that might damage a listed site or district. In such a case, federal law mandates a process, called Section 106 review, to ensure that alternatives will be explored to minimize the negative effect on the historic properties.

What will protect a site or neighborhood is a preservation commission established by a local ordinance. The preservation commission has the power to confer local landmark status on individual sites and districts, and thereafter review and approve changes to designated

sites and structures, generally prohibiting demolition and allowing alterations only when they would not damage the structures' historic character. The commission relies on published guidelines developed for each district under its purview.

CREATING A PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Indiana law (IC 36-7-11) gives communities the ability to create a historic preservation commission, sometimes known as a review board, with authority to manage local historic districts.

Local historic districts have been around since the 1930s and remain the most effective way to protect historic buildings. A city or town passes an enabling ordinance to create a commission. Consisting of three to nine community members, the commission recommends the designation of landmarks and local historic districts to the town council. Thereafter, owners in the district must apply to the commission for approval in the form of a "certificate of appropriateness" for exterior restoration, construction and demolition projects.

The enabling ordinance explains the commission's powers and duties. Each designation of a landmark or district then requires an additional city council ordinance.

Historic preservation commissions work in small towns like West Baden Springs and big cities like Indianapolis. The commissions that have been the most effective agents of revitalization rely on user-friendly design guidelines for restoration, additions, and new construction that are specific to each district. Studies in Indiana and other states show that property values in locally designated districts with design guidelines outpace similar undesignated areas and often the community as a whole.

Some preservation commissions also engage in hands-on restoration projects, nominate local landmarks and districts to the National Register, and publish walking tour brochures.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Locally-designated sites and districts benefit visually and economically when the preservation commission develops clear design guidelines drawn to protect the historic character of the structures, streetscapes and landscapes. The design guidelines offer education and a roadmap to owners as they plan rehabilitation and new construction projects.

Design guidelines provide continuity, and a consistent basis for decisions, regardless of who serves on the commission over time. They typically address architectural styles; building scale, massing and orientation; roofs; foundations; entrances, porches, doors and windows; additions and new construction; demolition; signage; and landscaping.

ADDITIONAL INCENTIVE

Historic preservation commissions can apply for Certified Local Government (CLG) status from the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology (DHPA). To qualify, a city or town must operate a credible preservation commission staffed by a professional, with qualified commissioners. Communities with CLG status gain a competitive edge in applying for grants from DHPA, which annually sets aside 10% of its federally derived funds for CLGs. Additional benefits include workshop scholarships and a formal role in the National Register nomination process for sites within the local government's jurisdiction.

NEED MORE HELP?

Indiana Landmarks created the Commission Assistance Program (CAP) to supply professional staff for small-town commissions that do not have city staff who can fill this role. For a fraction of the cost of a permanent city staff person, a town can hire Indiana Landmarks to manage its preservation commission. Indiana Landmarks helps the commission develop design guidelines, consults with property owners regarding certificates of appropriateness, prepares staff reports for the commission, keeps records of certificates granted, and provides training and continuing education for commission members.

ON-LINE RESOURCES

The Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology offers online info about Certified Local Government (CLG) status:

in.gov/dnr/historic-preservation/financial-assistance/certified-local-governments/

Indiana Landmarks maintains nine offices (see p. 3) where professional preservation staff can be called upon for help. Our website contains an entire page of links to valuable preservation resources:

indianalandmarks.org/resources

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions offers online publications and resources, including design guidelines used by commissions from coast to coast:

napcommissions.org/who-we-are

National Trust for Historic Preservation's website contains a great deal of helpful information on commissions and design guidelines:

savingplaces.org/stories/

[10-steps-to-establish-a-local-historic-district](#)

The *Technical Preservation Services* section of the **National Park Service** website contains links to the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and other helpful information:

nps.gov/orgs/1739/secretary-standards-treatment-historic-properties.htm

INDIANA LANDMARKS

Indiana Landmarks provides free professional advice to anyone considering rehabbing or nominating a historic building in their community to the National Register and can assist in the formation and staffing of preservation commissions. Call the regional office nearest you, or our state headquarters, to enlist Indiana Landmarks' help:

Central Regional Office

Indianapolis
317-639-4534 or 800-450-4534
central@indianalandmarks.org

Eastern Regional Office

Richmond
765-478-3172
east@indianalandmarks.org

Northeast Field Office

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260-563-7094
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Northern Regional Office

South Bend
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Northwest Field Office

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219-947-2657
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Southeast Field Office

Aurora
812-926-0983
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Southern Regional Office

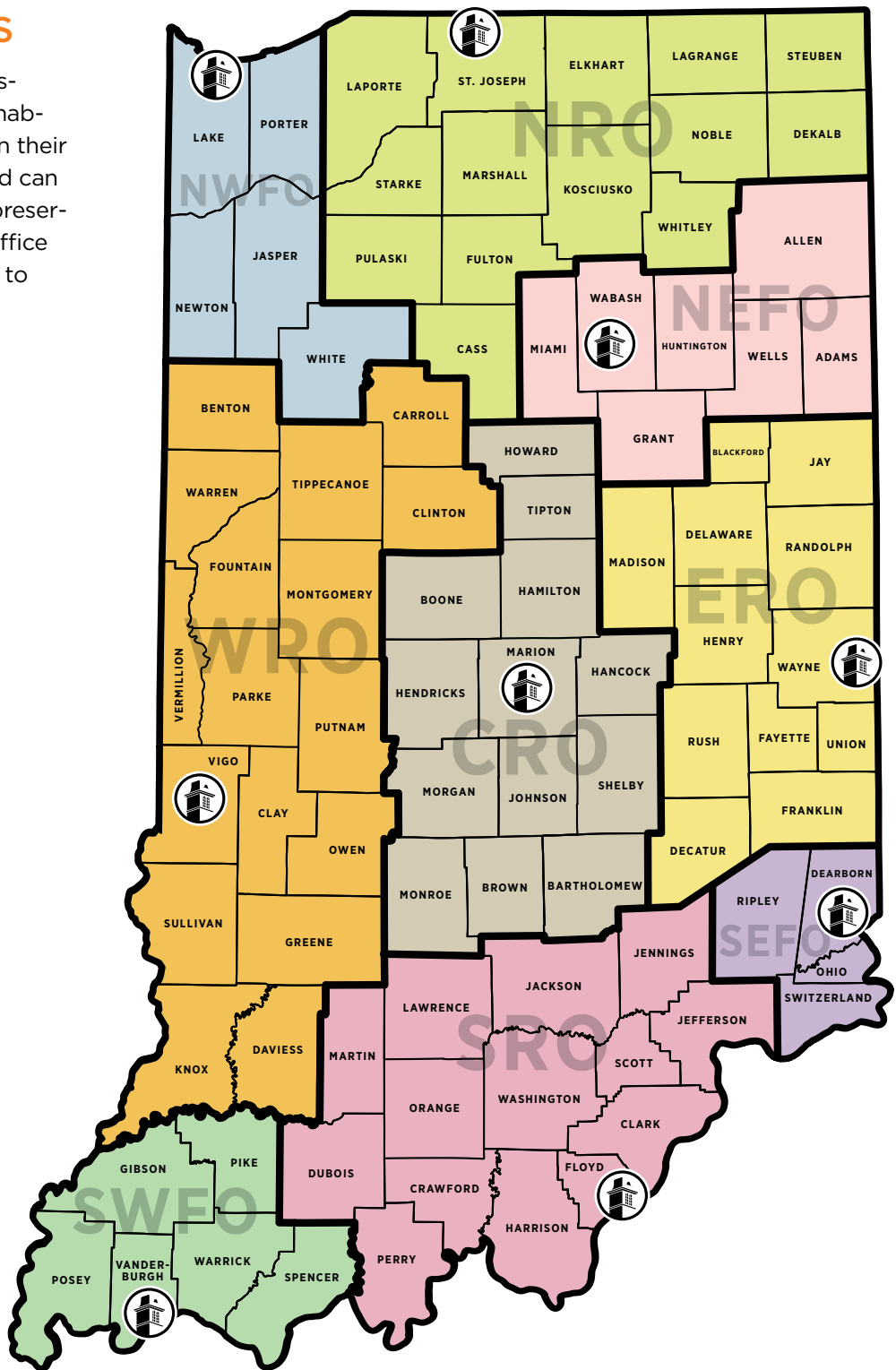
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812-284-4534
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*Indiana Landmarks revitalizes communities,
strengthens connections to our diverse heritage,
and saves meaningful places*