

New York State and National Registers of Historic Places

HELP FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT SPONSORS



Thank you for contacting New York's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). We appreciate your commitment to preserving your community's heritage and welcome your interest in sponsoring a historic district nomination. Hundreds of historic districts have been listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in New York, ranging from small rural hamlets to large urban neighborhoods. State and National Registers listing benefits historic properties in various ways, providing recognition and honor, inclusion in local planning efforts and, in some cases, by allowing owners to apply for various preservation incentives.

The National Register program was established under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and its counterpart, the State Register, was established under the New York State Historic Preservation Act of 1980. Since the inception of these acts, preparing historic district nominations has become more specialized, requiring, for example, detailed descriptions of resources, property boundaries, and the names and addresses of every legal property owner. At the same time, some local officials and property owners have become skeptical of registers listing, even though it generally carries no restrictions on private property owners, while others confuse State and National Registers historic districts with locally designated historic districts, which do carry some restrictions. As a result, sponsoring a district nomination is a substantial commitment, involving active community outreach, such as soliciting the support of local officials and providing information to district owners early in the nomination process.

Sponsoring a district nomination is both challenging and rewarding. Our job is to help and guide you every step of the way. The most successful districts are those that result from an informed partnership among the SHPO, the sponsor and the local community. To help you get started, we have compiled this guide, which explains the steps involved, outlines both your responsibilities and ours, provides ideas and samples that you can adapt for your own needs, and offers general information that we feel might be useful.

Please let us know if you have any questions. For information and assistance, visit nysparks.com/shpo or call 518-237-8643 to identify your National Register (NR) representative, who will be your primary point of contact for the project.

We look forward to working with you!



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**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

GETTING STARTED

Large historic districts are usually identified through comprehensive historic resources surveys. The SHPO's Survey Unit is responsible for guiding you through the survey process. Once you have completed a survey and identified a potential historic district, you may choose to use the information as a local planning tool or you may wish to nominate the district for registers listing. As you begin to weigh your options, contact the National Register Unit for assistance. Please note that small districts or those that have been previously inventoried do not always require an updated survey.

The first step is discussing your project with the NR representative for your county. Be prepared to discuss your goals, research, available resources, the size and complexity of the district, local issues and project schedule. The staff will need to review documentation about the proposed district and schedule a visit to review the district and discuss its proposed boundaries. Once everyone concurs with the district's eligibility and boundaries, you may begin preparing the nomination and promoting the district in the community as outlined below. There is no set time in which a district must be completed. It will depend upon how long it takes to complete the documentation and to share information about the project with the local community. SHPO staff commitments and priorities may also affect scheduling a date for review by the New York State Board for Historic Preservation (State Review Board). We are providing these instructions so that you are better informed as you begin the process, leaving fewer surprises that might cause problems or delays during the course of the project.

Canajoharie Historic District



The State and National Registers nomination for the Canajoharie Historic District was based on a survey funded under the Preservation League of New York State's Preserve New York Program (preservenys.org). The district encompasses most of the village, which is located on the south bank of the Mohawk River. Most of the buildings predate World War II, including numerous residential properties, brick and stone commercial buildings, various civic landmarks and several houses of worship. The nomination documents the settlement, development and growth of the community, from a small trading post on the Canajoharie Creek to a prosperous commercial and industrial center during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The district is also significant for its association with Beech-Nut Foods, a company that played an important role in the ways in which food was processed and marketed in the United States from the 1800s into the mid-twentieth century.

SPONSOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Preparation of the Nomination: Most district nominations are prepared by professional consultants. The SHPO recommends using professionals to prepare nominations due to the complexity of the nomination requirements. Professional consultants will save you considerable time because they know the requirements and have experience preparing nominations. When hiring a consultant, always ask for and consult references. Find out if the consultant has successfully and independently completed a district nomination. There are several grant programs that fund the hiring of professionals to prepare surveys and nominations, including the Preservation League of New York State's Preserve New York program (preservenys.org/grants) and the SHPO's Certified Local Government (CLG) grant program, available to CLG communities (nysparks.com/shpo/certified-local-governments/).

Outreach: Historic district sponsors are responsible for community outreach, which can make or break a project. It is your responsibility to gain the support of local leaders and property owners within the district. For ideas, see **Outreach Examples**. The SHPO will only bring a project to the State Review Board for consideration with demonstrated community support from local government and property owners.



Over the past few years, the SHPO has helped Buffalo list some of the city's largest neighborhoods on the State and National Registers. The nominations, which include thousands of properties, were initiated by a variety of local sponsors who were interested in making the preservation tax credits available to as many residents as possible. Hundreds of houses have been rehabilitated using historic homeowner tax credits, totaling millions of dollars in project expenditures. The listings include the **Allentown Historic District Expansion**, **University Park Historic District**, **Elmwood Historic District West** and **Hamlin Park Historic District**.

Owner Information: It is your responsibility to provide the SHPO with an accurate list of all property owners in the district (See **Owner Notification**).

Public Meeting: It is also your responsibility to organize at least one public informational meeting (not a hearing) and to invite the project partners and/or consultant, SHPO staff and local officials (as appropriate) to make brief presentations and answer questions about the district proposal. The primary purpose of the public meeting is to provide accurate information and to allow owners time to ask questions.

Celebrate: After the historic district is listed, plan to celebrate its official recognition. You should publicize the registers listing in various ways, including through the local media and on the web. Some project sponsors organize celebrations to coincide with community events, while others identify the district with roadside signage. The SHPO also issues news releases after properties and districts are listed.

SHPO RESPONSIBILITIES

Establish Boundaries and Themes: Your NR representative will work with you or your consultant early in the process to help you establish the most appropriate boundaries for the district and to identify the criteria and areas of significance that are best illustrated by your district.

Identify Contributing and Non-contributing Properties: Your NR representative will help you or your consultant establish a methodology for determining the district's contributing and non-contributing resources. The methodology will guide you or your consultant in the identification and evaluation of all the district's features, including but not limited to buildings, structures, landscapes, etc. Once you have finalized your list of district resources, your representative will review it with you.

Review Nomination Standards: Your NR representative will review with you or your consultant the nomination requirements, including nomination text, mapping and photography—and provide nomination examples.

Review of Draft Nomination: It is your responsibility to prepare the historic district nomination, but the SHPO is responsible for ensuring that all nominations meet established standards. Nominations must be well written, address the registers criteria and follow standard grammatical and bibliographic guidelines. Citations must follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines. Your NR representative can provide you with samples of approved nominations, research materials if available, prepared contexts and/or suggestions of topics to cover. Your representative will also review nomination drafts, advise you of strengths or deficiencies, and perhaps ask for clarification of certain points or request additional information. Nominations may be returned for revisions and they will most likely be edited.

Schedule Official Review: When the draft is nearing completion, your NR representative will work with you to identify a date for review by the State Review Board. Typically, the review date will be about six months after the completion of the draft to allow plenty of time for community outreach. The State Review Board meets four times a year, so timing for every project will vary. About two months before the State Review Board meeting, the SHPO will notify property owners and local officials (See **Owner Notification**). Your NR representative will discuss the district proposal and answer questions about it at a local public informational meeting. Depending on the needs of the sponsor, this meeting can be held before or after the district notification letters go out. Your NR representative will also answer phone calls from property owners, so please direct people with specific questions to them. They are always ready to take calls and help answer questions.

State Review Board: Your NR representative will present the nomination at a scheduled meeting of the State Review Board, which reviews and recommends all of New York's State and National Registers nominations. Sponsors and consultants are welcome, but not required, to attend. If it is approved, your NR representative will prepare the nomination for final submission to the State Historic Preservation Officer, who is also the commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The commissioner confers State Register status and places the properties in nomination to the National Register. The nominations are then sent to the National Park Service for final review and listing on the National Register.

Once the district is listed, we will be happy to be involved in your celebrations! We can send a framed registers certificate or present it in person at a district listing ceremony depending on staff availability.



Central Troy Historic District

OWNER NOTIFICATION

District sponsors must be aware of and familiar with the details of the owner notification process, which is required by federal law. Owners are often confused by the process and misinformed about its consequences. The owner objection regulations tend to be particularly confusing. That is why it is important to lay the ground work by active outreach in your community. Part of that includes your ability to answer questions about notification procedures before rumors get started that may disrupt your efforts. Remember that while the SHPO aims to make these procedures comprehensible, it is not free to change them because National Register program regulations require that State Historic Preservation Offices follow specific legal notification procedures. SHPO staff relies on the assistance of sponsors in order to gather accurate information and meet the notification deadlines.

Each property owner within the proposed historic district and the chief elected local official of the appropriate municipality must be notified in writing that the state intends to bring a nomination to the State Review Board and must be given an opportunity to comment on the proposal. The list of owners within the district must be obtained from either official land or tax records no more than 90 days before the letters go out to owners. The sponsor is responsible for obtaining this list within the appropriate time period. Your NR representative will provide the sponsor with an appropriate deadline. If there are multiple owners for a single property, EACH of them must be listed individually (i.e., married/unmarried couples, multiple family members, condominium owners, etc.). Corporate owners (LLC's, partnerships, cooperatives, etc.) are listed once under the corporate name. Owner lists should be submitted in EXCEL spread sheet format. The SHPO is required to send these notification letters between 30 and 75 days in advance of the State Review Board meeting. Typically, we send letters out approximately 60 days in advance.

If the nomination is approved by the State Review Board and signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer, property owners and elected officials will receive a letter notifying them that it has been listed on the State Register. If the nomination is approved by the National Park Service, another letter will be sent informing owners and local officials that the district has been listed on the National Register.

Crown Heights North Historic District



The SHPO has been helping the Crown Heights North Association, a nonprofit neighborhood improvement organization, to recognize the Crown Heights North community by listing the Crown Heights North Historic District on the State and National Registers so that owners in the district will be eligible for preservation tax credits. The district is located in the northwest section of Crown Heights and illustrates the development of this community as it spread southward and eastward during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in response to mass

transit improvements. The district contains more than 1,000 historic properties, including a large concentration of houses and apartment buildings as well as various institutional and commercial buildings. The district's listing promises to encourage building rehabilitation and neighborhood reinvestment, stimulate economic development, create more jobs and improve the quality of local community life.

OWNER OBJECTIONS

Under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (amended 1980), private property owners must be given the opportunity to object to the proposed nomination of their properties. No owner is required to comment and owners don't "vote" on the district. Rather, owners who object to the listing may submit a notarized statement stating that they are the owner of the subject property (give address) and that they object. Notarization is a requirement of the federal government and cannot be waived.

If a majority of the private property owners in the district file notarized objections, the district cannot be listed on the National Register. In determining a majority, each owner is counted once, regardless of how much or how little property he/she owns; this is why we need to record all owners of record. Objections are only counted toward the listing of the district as a whole. If a majority does not object, no one owner can exempt himself/herself from the district by means of a notarized objection. These procedures are federal regulations that cannot be altered by the SHPO.

If a district cannot be listed because of owner objections, it will be determined officially eligible for listing. This means that all applicable review responsibilities for projects using state or federal funds will apply, but no one will be able to take advantage of grant or tax incentive programs. The State Register does not have an owner objection clause. The decision to proceed with State but not National Register listing is made on a case by case basis but seldom occurs.

CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

For municipalities with Certified Local Government status, local historic preservation commissions and chief elected officials must be given an opportunity to review the final draft nomination at least 60 days before the State Review Board meeting. After doing so, they report to the SHPO whether or not they believe the property or district should be nominated. If both the local commission and the chief elected official find that the property or district is not eligible for listing, the SHPO cannot proceed with the district nomination.



Clinton-Columbia Historic District

Located on the northwest side of the city of Elmira, the Clinton-Columbia Historic District is composed of more than eighty historic buildings that illustrate the development of the neighborhood from its first lot divisions and streets in the 1860s through its full development in 1924. The neighborhood's initial development coincided with Elmira's economy changing from agricultural to industrial and the city's rapid expansion in terms of acres and population. The community's location along the Chemung River made it a hub for transportation and commerce, attracting residents from the surrounding towns as well as new immigrants, creating a demand for affordable housing. The district is considered to be one of Elmira's most significant remaining examples of a mixed-economic neighborhood that has retained many fine examples of mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic architecture. The nomination was sponsored by Elmira's Near Westside Neighborhood Association and funded under the Preservation League of New York State's Preserve New York Program (preservenys.org).

SAMPLE OUTREACH TIMELINE

The State Review Board meets quarterly and meetings are usually scheduled for March, June, September and December. Final nominations must be submitted at least three months before the review board meeting to allow time for the required legal notifications. When nominations are completed earlier, sponsors can better focus their time and energy on community outreach.

This sample timeline is intended to serve as a guide, rather than a mandate. There are lots of ways for you to reach out to your community about your project! **The items in bold are directly related to our required notification procedures.** SHPO staff will attend at least one public meeting in order to answer questions from property owners and interested citizens. These meetings can be held before or after the state notification letters go out. Pre-letter meetings are strongly encouraged.

This sample timeline assumes that your nomination will be reviewed in March. You can extrapolate for meetings held in June, September and/or December.

For a State Review Board meeting in March, your outreach efforts should begin the year before

September **Final Draft approved by SHPO**

October Send out flyer/brochure/postcards about the district proposal
Put out posters at local businesses, community message boards, etc.

November Send out a press release about the district proposal
Send out a letter from local officials to property owners explaining and offering support of historic district (in advance of state notification letters going out)
Hold an informal public informational meeting
Put information (map, flyers, etc.) on an appropriate community website

December Set up an information table or have brochures available at a community event
Late December: List of all owners in the district due to SHPO
(see official notification procedures section for more information)

January **Early January: SHPO sends out first notification letters**
Send out press release/flyers/brochures

February **Mid-February: Public meeting (if no earlier meeting with SHPO staff)**
Generate local media/newspaper coverage about the district

March **Mid-March: State Review Board meeting**

Post Meeting **Official press release sent by SHPO;** it may be picked up in local newspapers
Use release to generate local media/newspaper coverage, interviews, etc.

District is listed on the State Register; **SHPO sends second letter** to notify owners and officials

District is listed on the National Register (approximately two months after submission); **SHPO sends third letter**

Local celebration could be scheduled; more local media coverage is encouraged

The types of effective outreach activities differ by community and by project. For specific ideas, see **Outreach Examples**. Try to reach people where they are and be creative. Barring that, tried-and-true mailings always work!

HISTORIC DISTRICT OUTREACH EXAMPLES

Local outreach is critical to the success of most State and National Register districts. By engaging owners and neighbors within the proposed historic district, nomination sponsors have an opportunity to cultivate local pride and community support for the project. Tell them why the district's history is important, what makes your community special and why you think National Register designation is worth pursuing. By the time we send out our notification letter, sponsors should have already completed substantial outreach to owners within the district; it is far preferable for them to hear from you before they hear from us!

Even if you are still in the planning process, it is never too early to do outreach! Use these ideas, and look through the attached examples to help you get started.

Public Informational Meetings

Sponsors should hold at least one public informational meeting that all property owners have been invited to before the district nomination is brought to the State Review Board. Often, sponsors hold a meeting soon after an eligible district has been defined. Meetings are also typically held about one month after the state notification letters have gone out. Local elected officials should also be invited to attend public meetings in their districts.



Public meetings offer an opportunity for owners to ask questions about the proposed district and what it means for the community. It is best to start with a short presentation about the district and the registers program and allow plenty of time for questions.

Sometimes it is a good idea to have people who live in registered districts or representatives of other communities with listed historic districts in attendance to explain how the listing has helped their communities while not harming them.

Early meetings can be held without SHPO staff, and sometimes it is a good idea to hold a frank and open discussion without any perceived outside influence. However, at least one meeting must be held with SHPO staff present to answer questions.

Media Coverage

Spread more information about the historic district by sending a press release or editorial to your local newspaper. As the process progresses, newspapers may also write articles about your efforts. While not all property owners will read the online or print newspaper, media coverage will help familiarize the community with the project.

Mailings

Invite property owners to public meetings or relay information about the proposed district by sending postcards, brochures or flyers. These can be mailed to each property owner; keep in mind that not all properties may be owner-occupied. Postcards, brochures, or flyers can also be posted or kept at a central location such as the community bulletin board, local library, historical society, post office, city hall or at a local business that supports the project.

HISTORIC DISTRICT OUTREACH EXAMPLES CONTINUED

Letter from Local Officials

For many historic district nominations, local political support can be critical. Once you have obtained this support, ask the leading public official (mayor, town supervisor, etc.) in your community to send a letter to each of the property owners within the district expressing the municipality's support for the project.

Events

Consider holding a public presentation or other event spotlighting the history of your district, such as walking tours of the district, an informational booth at the local farmer's market, an informal community get-together with light refreshments, or a historic restaurant and/or bar tour. You will help spread appreciation for the area's history, have fun and possibly gain some media attention in the process.

Website

Establish an online presence for your project by creating a website or Facebook page. Attractive-looking, free websites can be created with minimal technical knowledge. The content of your website is only limited by your imagination (and possibly the website service's storage capacity). Consider including historic photographs, a history of the district, information about the historic district proposal, a map of the district and a link to our website for more information about the State and National Registers. Be sure to include the link to any handouts you create, as well as in your news releases.

Be creative—and have fun!



Almost every historic district that is eligible for the State and National Registers was created as a result of action by a community over decades or centuries. Similarly, sponsors of successful historic districts must work within their community to achieve their goals, such as partnering with your local Business Improvement District or other civic organizations. The ways and opportunities for establishing a local presence are endless and will vary for each community. Reach out and share your pride in what makes your community special—you'll be well on your way to success!

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