

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

HISTORIC DESIGNATION PROCESS

The process of designating a property as historic consists of seven steps, beginning with the identification of a property to be nominated and ending with the action of the Historical Commission on the nomination.

1. Identify a building, structure, site or object for possible nomination

The designation process begins with the identification of a building, structure, site or object that may have historic significance and be worthy of listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. There are many ways to identify historic buildings, structures, sites or objects suitable for listing on the Register ranging from systematic research about historic events or notable architects to simply looking around your neighborhood or the places in the city that you visit. Many buildings in Center City are already listed on the Register, but there are fewer buildings on the Register in other sections of the city. Take a walk around your neighborhood and see if there are examples of outstanding architecture, such as libraries, churches or houses. Look for interesting structures such as bridges, or remarkable historic objects. Talk to your neighbors and community leaders about the history of the neighborhood and important events that have taken place there in the past.

2. Determine if the building, structure, site or object is already listed and is eligible

Once having identified a building, structure, site or object that you think has historic significance the next step is to check the Philadelphia Register to see if the property is already included. This can be done by going to the Historical Commission's website (www.phila.gov/historical) or calling the Commission's staff at 215-686-7660. If the property is not listed, the next step is to see if it meets one or more of the Criteria for Designation.

3. Discuss the nomination with the staff of the Historical Commission

Before beginning to prepare a nomination it is advisable to discuss the property with the staff of the Historical Commission. They will be able to give advice concerning the nomination and tell you if there is information about the property in the Historical Commission's files. The Historical Commission's office is in the One Parkway Building, 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor. The staff can be contacted by phone at 215-686-7660.

4. Prepare the nomination

To nominate a building, structure, site or object a nomination form must be completed using the Historical Commission's official nomination form. The nomination form includes basic information about the property and requires two essays and photographs of the property. The form can be found here:

<http://www.phila.gov/historical/Documents/individual%20nomination%20form.pdf>

5. Review by the staff

Once a nomination has been submitted to the Historical Commission, it is first reviewed by the staff for correctness and completeness. The staff may ask for information to be added or revised, or it may revise or add some information itself. When the application is considered complete, the staff notifies the owner that the property has been nominated and that a meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation has been scheduled. This notification must be given at least 30 days in advance of the meeting to review the nomination. The Historical Commission's jurisdiction over the property—meaning its authority to review proposals for alterations or demolition—begins from the date notice is sent to the property owner.

6. Review by the Committee on Historic Designation

The Committee on Historic Designation is an advisory committee to the Historical Commission. It consists of members of the Commission and others who are knowledgeable about the history and architecture of the city. The Committee will hold a public meeting to consider the nomination and to determine if the nomination makes an argument that the property meets one or more of the Criteria for Designation. The Committee hears testimony from the staff, the nominator, the property owner, and the general public. It may ask for revisions to

the nomination or additional information. The Committee makes a non-binding recommendation to the Historical Commission as to whether the property satisfies the Criteria for Designation set forth in the nomination.

7. Review and action by the Historical Commission

The recommendation of the Committee on Historic Designation is usually presented to the Historical Commission at its next scheduled monthly meeting. The Historical Commission will review the nomination and the recommendation of the Committee and will also hear public testimony on the nomination. It will then vote on the nomination and, if approved, the property will be listed on the Philadelphia Register. Owners of properties listed on the Register can obtain a plaque from the Historical Commission, for a nominal charge, to place on the property showing that it is listed on the Register.

****This document is derived from the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia's 2007 *Guide to Nominating a Property to the Philadelphia Register*. Please note that the links and the sections of the Code cited in this document are out of date:**

http://www.preservationalliance.com/publications/PA_Nominations_Online.pdf

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

- A. Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or
- B. Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or
- C. Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or
- D. Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or
- E. Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or
- F. Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or
- G. Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or
- H. Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or
- I. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- J. Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who can nominate a property to the Philadelphia Register?

Anyone may nominate a property to be listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places—the property owner, an interested private citizen, a community group, a non-profit organization, or the staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission.

What types of properties can be nominated to the Philadelphia Register?

The historic preservation ordinance defines “properties” as buildings, structures, sites or objects. The definition of each of these, as contained in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code, is as follows:

- A *building* is a structure, its site and appurtenances created to shelter any form of human activity.
- A *structure* is a work made up of interdependent and interrelated parts in a definite pattern of organization constructed by man and affixed to real property.
- A *site* is the location of a significant event, a prehistoric or historic occupation or activity or a building or structure whether standing, ruined or vanished, where the location itself maintains historical, cultural or archaeological value regardless of the value of any existing structure.
- An *object* is a material thing of functional, aesthetic, cultural, historic or scientific value that may be, by nature or design, movable yet related to a specific setting or environment.

How do I know if a building, structure, site or object is already on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places?

The website of the Philadelphia Historical Commission contains a searchable PDF of all properties listed on the Philadelphia Register (www.phila.gov/historical, under What’s New). Please note that the document available online may not reflect the most recent designations, since properties are regularly added to the Philadelphia Register. It is always a good idea to call the Historical Commission staff at 215-686-7660 to determine whether a property is designated or not.

Is consent of the property owner required?

Consent of the property owner is *not* required for the Historical Commission to include a property on the Philadelphia Register. When a building, structure, site or object is nominated for listing on the Register, the Historical Commission is required to give the property owner written notice that the property has been nominated and that public meetings are scheduled to review the nomination. This provides the property owner with the opportunity to comment on the designation, indicate support or opposition, or suggest modifications to the nomination.

What buildings, structures, sites or objects are suitable for designation and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register?

All types of buildings, structures, sites and objects can be designated and listed on the Philadelphia Register, provided they meet at least one of the criteria for designation listed in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code (see Criteria for Designation on previous page).

In Philadelphia, the criteria for historic designation are quite broad; architectural significance is not the only criteria for designating an historic property. Properties can be historically significant because of their relationship to people and events important in the history of the city or the nation. Many properties will meet several of the Criteria for Designation; however, it is necessary only to meet one. For example, in 2004 the Historical Commission listed Marian Anderson’s home—a rather plain South Philadelphia rowhouse—on the Philadelphia Register because of the association of the property with Ms. Anderson, an internationally prominent concert artist and important figure in the civil rights movement in the United States. Nor is age the determining factor in whether a building is suitable for designation. While it is necessary for a historic property to be over 50 years of age to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, no such requirement exists in Philadelphia’s preservation ordinance. However, sufficient time is needed to have elapsed in order to be certain that a property is historically significant.

How long does it take for a nomination to be approved?

Once a nomination is submitted to the Historical Commission, the length of time for the nomination to be reviewed can vary. The nomination must first be reviewed by the staff to determine that the application is correct and complete. Once the nomination is determined complete, the staff of the Historical Commission sends notice of the nomination and the next meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation to the property owner at least 30 days in advance of the meeting. After the Committee offers a recommendation, that recommendation is transmitted to the Historical Commission for its review and action, usually within one month after the Committee reaches a decision. From the submission of a nomination to the decision of the Commission, the process usually takes about six months.

What are the implications of listing on the Philadelphia Register for property owners?

Once a property has been listed on the Philadelphia Register the property cannot be demolished or the exterior altered without the approval of the Historical Commission. Property owners are required to submit to the Historical Commission for review and approval any work on the exterior of the property that requires a building permit or would alter its appearance. This includes such items as a new roof, porch repair, roof deck, brick pointing; additions to a designated building or construction of a new building on a designated site; site features such as fences, walls, walks, drives and major landscape features. In the case of objects, review by the Commission is required if the object is to be altered, demolished or moved.

For more information, please contact the Historical Commission staff at 215-686-7660, or by email to one of the following Historic Preservation Planners:

Kim Chantry: kim.chantry@phila.gov

Laura DiPasquale: laura.dipasquale@phila.gov

Meredith Keller: meredith.keller@phila.gov

Allyson Mehley: allyson.mehley@phila.gov

Megan Schmitt: megan.schmitt@phila.gov

Useful Links:

Philadelphia Historical Commission: <http://www.phila.gov/historical>

Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia's Guide to Nominating a Property to the Philadelphia Register (please note that the links and the sections of the Code cited in this document are out of date):

http://www.preservationalliance.com/publications/PA_Nominations_Online.pdf

Historic map research: <https://www.philageohistory.org/geohistory/>

Historic building research: <https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/>

Historic photographs: <https://www.phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive/Home.aspx>