

## Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | A primer on Evanston's landmark districts

Part two of two on the importance of Evanston's historic districts

by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) December 21st, 2022



Four buildings represent four of the National Register Historic Districts in Evanston. A fifth district, Suburban Apartment Buildings, features multifamily residences across the city. Credit: All photos by Jack Weiss except lower left by Thshriver/Wikipedia.org

Part one of this series, [posted Dec. 6](#), identified Evanston's five historic districts. Part two describes the differences between and benefits of National Register and Local Landmark Districts.

### National Register and Local Landmark Districts

A National Register Historic District is a geographically defined area, urban or rural, possessing a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of sites, buildings, structures or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development. Designation of a National Register Historic District is largely honorific for property owners but establishes a sense of community identity and pride.

A Local Historic District is a district designated by a local ordinance which falls under the jurisdiction of a local historic preservation review commission. A local historic district is generally "overlaid" on the existing zoning classifications in a community. Designation of a Local Historic District offers property owners the protections that are provided in local preservation ordinances.

In short, "A National Register District identifies; a Local District Protects." The Historic Preservation Division of Georgia's Department of Natural Resources provides useful details about both types of historic districts:

“Both National Register district and locally designated historic districts can be used as effective preservation tools, either independently or together, to help preserve a community’s historic resources. For example, the National Register program might be used as a convenient and credible way to identify a community’s historic resources, followed by local district designation, which would further protect and enhance those resources through the process of design review.

“Conversely, a local survey to establish a local historic district might also be used as the basis for a National Register district nomination, which would afford additional preservation incentives, including rehabilitation tax credits, to properties protected in the local district. Local district designation might also be used to selectively protect portions of National Register districts considered especially significant to a community or subject to particularly strong development pressures.”


The document goes further to explain the specific benefits in each of the two types of historic districts. For those seeking to better understand the implications of ownership in National Register and Local landmark districts, see [this document](#).

### Looking ahead

In September 2022, as the previous Thoughts on Design [four-part series](#) about the proposed Northwest Evanston Landmark District was being written, the Evanston Preservation Commission announced “Preserve 2040” – the commission’s [Long-Range Work Plan](#), a policy document to serve as a guide for oversight and administration of the community’s historic preservation program for the next 20-plus years.

**Preserve 2040**  
*Preservation Commission Long-Range Work Plan*

Historic Preservation Program September 13, 2022

 Community Development

“Preserve 2040”, Evanston Preservation Commission website. Credit: City of Evanston

The plan's mission: "To enhance the quality of life for all Evanston residents and visitors through the ongoing work and benefits of historic preservation." Its vision: "In 2040 Evanston, Illinois is one of Midwestern America's most vibrant places – a city known for its rich historic, cultural, architectural, and environmental legacy."

The Plan's first value statement: "Evanston's cultural and architectural resources are tangible links to its current and past identities. Future Landmark and District designations keep pace with evolving preservation trends and aspirations for future identities."

The first goal of "Preserve 2040" is threefold:

1. Identify and preserve resources significant to Evanston's identity, heritage and vibrancy.
2. Support initiatives that continue to identify and document Evanston's heritage resources.
3. Support designation of significant resources as Landmarks and Historic Districts as recommended through survey and documentation efforts.

If an effort to create the Northwest Evanston Historic District gains enthusiastic community support in the next months, a well-defined endorsement will come from Evanston's Preservation Commission, as the "Preserve 2040" plan hints, and from preservation-minded civic leaders who value the benefits of the city's historic districts.

*Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" articles focus on Evanston's design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit [designevanston.org](http://designevanston.org) to learn more about the organization.*

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