

Historic Preservation Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What is historic preservation?

Answer: Historic preservation encompasses a wide range of activities. It may include the identification, evaluation, recordation, documentation, containing, acquisition, protection, management, rehabilitation, restoration, stabilization, maintenance, or reconstruction of properties (individually or collectively) that are deemed significant to our history, and which warrant special measures for their protection.

Question: What does the historic preservation program in Coral Gables consist of?

Answer: The City of Coral Gables has employed professional staff to administer its program of identification, documentation and evaluation of historic properties. The City Commission and City Manager appoint a Historic Preservation Board composed of nine citizens who make judgments regarding the designation, protection, restoration, and rehabilitation of significant properties.

Question: What is historic designation?

Answer: Local historic designation is a process of public hearings through which properties significant to the community are nominated to the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places.

Question: What makes a property or district significant?

Answer: Generally the property must be at least 50 years old, and possess architectural, aesthetic or historical value. That value is judged by an association with events that have taken place over the course of time; association with a person(s) who has made contributions to our history; is the work of a master or expresses architectural distinction; and yielded or is likely to yield information about our history or prehistory (i.e. archaeological significance.)

Question: Who may enact an historic landmark designation?

Answer: Any person who has specific information about the significance of a property may nominate it for listing. After deliberation at a scheduled public hearing, the Historic Preservation Board makes their decision.

Question: What are the benefits of local historic designation?

Answer: The City encourages historic preservation in order to strengthen the economy of the city by stabilizing and enhancing property values in historic areas. Designation may assist a property owner to become eligible for certain Federal tax incentives (e.g. easements; investment tax credits), or become eligible to compete for Federal or State grant funds. Local tax incentives may be applied for improvements and if approved, provide a ten year freeze on the value of those improvements made to local historic properties. Further, the Historic Preservation Board may consider that the provisions of the "Zoning Code" be varied, and/or recommend to the City Commission that transfer of development rights be granted; and that amendments to the Zoning and Building Codes be made in order to further the interests of historic preservation.

- Question:** What restrictions will apply if my property is designated?
Answer: Any work done to the exterior of the property which requires a building permit (e.g. alterations, additions, modifications), will be reviewed by the Historic Preservation office to determine the degree of impact to the existing architecture of the property. If the work is considered to be "minor" in character (e.g. re-roofing, painting; repairs in-kind,) the matter may be handed administratively by Staff. If the work is considered to have "substantial" impact (e.g. an addition, a demolition, a major exterior remodeling), the matter will be referred to the Historic Preservation Board and scheduled for a public hearing.
- Question:** Doesn't historic designation complicate and delay the issuance of building permits for my property, and make the process more costly?
Answer: Building permit requests for designated properties are first sent to the Historic Preservation office for review. The staff helps to liaison with the Building and Zoning Department and keeps in contact throughout the process so that matters are facilitated rather than made more complicated. There are no additional fees because of the historic status of the property.
- Question:** Will historic designation prevent me from making repairs or changes to my home that I wish to make?
Answer: Changes to an historic property are allowed, and are judged for their compatibility with the existing architecture. For example, an addition may be approved if it is located on a secondary facade or does not appreciably change the character of the existing architecture.
- Question:** Does local historic landmark designation increase the amount of assessed property taxes?
Answer: No. Properties listed in the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places are not subject to increased property taxes solely because of their designation.
- Question:** Are there any local "tax breaks" given when a property is locally designated?
Answer: If improvements to an historic property are made and approved through the Certificate of Appropriateness review process, the owner may apply for local tax incentives. Both Miami-Dade County and the City of Coral Gables have enacted legislation which allows the ad valorem portion of taxes for the value of the improvements only to be exempted for a period of ten years.
- Question:** Does local historic landmark designation enhance the value of the property?
Answer: National trends have shown that property value have increased because of historic designation programs. The reason for that effect are difficult to isolate. For residential areas in particular, buyers have appreciated the unique and special character of the properties, and have perceived the protective measure afforded by local historic designation as a means to ensure the stability of that community.

- Question:** **How long does designation last?**
Answer: The designation remains in the effect as long as the property exists, or until such time as the property is so irreversibly altered that it no longer possessed those qualities which originally contributed to its significant.
- Question:** **What is a Certificate of Appropriateness?**
Answer: A Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) verifies that the specified work on the local historic landmark or property located within a historic district has been approved and is consistent with the Secretary of the Interiors Guidelines for Rehabilitation. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required before most exterior work begins, before a building permit can be issued, and before any variance can be granted. Some proposals that are considered to be maintenance do not require COA review.
- Question:** **By what criteria are design changes evaluated?**
Answer: National guidelines titled the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation are used to evaluate the appropriate request. A Certificate of Appropriateness is then issued for all approved design proposals.
- Question:** **What is a historic district?**
Answer: A historic district is a geographically defined area possessing a significant concentration, linkage or continuity of landmarks, improvements, or landscape features united by historic events or aesthetically by plan or physical development.
- Question:** **When did the City of Coral Gables first enact legislation to address historic preservation in the community?**
Answer: In 1973, the city became the first in Dade County to enact legislation, which addressed the community's interest in preserving its historic resources.
- Question:** **Is the interior remodeling of a designated historic structure subject to this review?**
Answer: No, not unless ad valorem tax relief is requested for the impact of the interior. There are a few examples of public spaces which are specifically identified as having extraordinary character (e.g. the Biltmore Hotel lobby and tower suites), which the review requirement does apply.
- Question:** **Where are the administrative offices for the historic preservation program and what are the hours of operation?**
Answer: The address for the office is: 2327 Salzedo Street, 2nd Floor, Coral Gables, Florida 33134. We are located within the "Old Police and Fire Station" – City Municipal Building, one block north of Miracle Mile (Coral Way-SW 24th Street) and one block east of Le Jeune Road (SW 42nd Avenue) on the northeast corner of the intersection of Aragon Avenue and Salzedo Street. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm and is closed on all major holidays. For more information, please feel free to contact the office.
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