

WICHITA FALLS

LANDMARK & HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION OVERVIEW

City Planning Division P.O. Box 1431 Wichita Falls, Texas 76307
(940) 761-7451 fax: (940) 761-7419

CATEGORIES OF LANDMARK NOMINATIONS

Properties may be nominated for LANDMARK designation in one of five categories: district, site, building, structure, or object.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Historic Preservation Ordinance criteria stipulate that for a property to be designated a Wichita Falls LANDMARK it must possess "significance" in the city's history, architecture, archaeology, culture and/or geography in the following ways:

1. *Historic and Cultural.* Is associated with significant historic events or development of the City or with the lives of persons or groups significant in its past; or
2. *Architectural.* Embodies distinguishing characteristics of architectural style or type, or craftsmanship, or represents a significant innovation of method or use of materials; or
3. *Neighborhood or District.* As a neighborhood or district, represents a significant or distinguishable area; or
4. *Archaeological.* Possesses archaeological value, or based on evidence, can be expected to yield information important to history; or
5. *Geography or Community Sentiment.* Because of location, has become of value to a neighborhood, community area, or the city, or represents an aspect of community sentiment or pride; or
6. Is an existing or is proposed for recognition as a national historic landmark or state historic landmark, or is proposed for entry into The National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to meeting the criteria of significance, a property must retain its historical architectural character and integrity and be in a good state of repair.

➤ NOMINATION PROCEDURE

A. INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK

Designation as a Wichita Falls LANDMARK is a highly selective process by which properties are evaluated for significance and architectural integrity. Information and documentation required by the Landmark Commission is very specific, and the obligation for providing a *fully documented nomination rests with the applicant*. Insufficient information will delay the reviewing process.

A nominal fee for processing an individual landmark nomination is \$25.00 (not applicable if Landmark Commission initiated nomination). A fee schedule for historic district nominations is outlined in the instructional guidebook or is available in the City Planning Division.

The usual steps for an individual LANDMARK designation are:

1. *Preliminary Conference.* Bring snapshots of the property and some information regarding its significance to the Planning Division office. Staff will conduct a preliminary review and schedule a conference to provide the applicant with nomination forms, the instructional guidebook and requirements.
2. *Submission of Nomination Material.* Submit a fully documented and completed Landmark Nomination Form 'A' filled out in accordance with the Commission's guidelines, accompanied by all required materials and a fee of \$25 payable to the City of Wichita Falls. Nominations need to be received by the Planning Division at least ten (10) working days prior to the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting.
3. *Preliminary Hearing.* The Landmark Commission welcomes an applicant to schedule a hearing with the Commission prior to completion of the nomination forms concerning any questions or advice that might be needed. The request for such a hearing must be received in the Planning Division ten (10) days before the next regular Landmark Commission meeting.
4. *Landmark Commission Hearing.* The Commission meets in *open session* to evaluate each nominated property in accordance with the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Its recommendations for designation are forwarded to the City Council for final approval.
5. *Council Hearing and Designation.* At the next regularly scheduled meeting, the City Council acts on the recommendations of the Commission, and if approved, the property is designated an official Wichita Falls LANDMARK. It is listed in the Wichita Falls Register of Historic Places for protection and is awarded a bronze marker symbolizing its significance to the City.

B. RESIDENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Generally a HISTORIC DISTRICT is considered a geographically defined area, possessing a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by land or physical development. A HISTORIC DISTRICT may also include individual elements separated geographically but linked by association of history. Information and

documentation required by the Landmark Commission is very specific, and the obligation for providing a *fully documented* nomination rests with the applicant. Insufficient information will delay the reviewing process.

Application fees for HISTORIC DISTRICT nomination include a \$100 base fee and either a \$5 fee per property for districts with <50 properties or a \$10 fee per property for large district with > 51 properties. Additional details regarding historic district fees are contained in the nomination procedures manual on the website or available in the City Planning Division.

The usual steps for nominating a RESIDENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT are:

1. *Preliminary Conference.* Bring snapshots of the properties and some information regarding its significance to the Planning Division office. If staff determines the properties have historical significance an application for historic district nomination will be either given to the applicant or can be downloaded from the City's website.
2. *Submission of Nomination Material.* Submit a fully documented and complete Historic District Nomination Packet filled out in accordance with the Commission's guidelines and accompanied by Property Owner Response Forms containing a minimum of 75% of the property owners' written consent before an application is considered complete. All other required materials (fees - payable to the City of Wichita Falls, photos and district property inventory list, etc.) must be submitted in order to complete the application. Nominations need to be received in the Planning Division a minimum of ten (10) working days prior to the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting to be reviewed.
3. *Preliminary Hearing.* The Landmark Commission & staff will schedule a public hearing to review & discuss the historic district nomination with notices mailed to all property owners within the proposed area for nomination. The Commission meets in open session to ensure the proposed nomination is in accordance with the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Its recommendations for designation are forwarded to the City Council for final approval.

Any owner whose property is included in an application for historic district designation may remove his property from consideration by the Council by filing written notice with the City Community Development Department at least one day prior to the date of the Commission meeting to hear the application. In the event the property is thereafter sold or conveyed to another party, the property shall immediately be included in the historic district and must comply with all requirements of the district

4. *Council Hearing and Designation.* At the next regularly scheduled meeting, the City Council acts on the recommendations of the Commission, and if approved, the properties within the outlined area are officially designated a Wichita Falls Historic District. It is listed in the Wichita Falls Register of Historic Places for protection.

➤ LANDMARK COMMISSION MEETINGS

The Landmark Commission generally convenes on a monthly basis (4th Thursday of the month at 3:30pm), when there is business for consideration. Their meetings are conducted in the Council Conference Room (1st floor) of Memorial Auditorium.

➤ TAX BENEFITS

Restoration of a City Landmark may make that property eligible for a freeze on ad valorem taxes for a period of from five (5) to eight (8) years. Plans for restoration must be approved by the Landmark Commission *before* any work begins and the cost of the historic rehabilitation project must exceed the following:

- (a) **Commercial Projects or Improvements**, 50 percent of the assessed valuation of the structure for the year the rehabilitation is to begin or \$100,000, whichever is less. The tax freeze shall not exceed five years following completion of the rehabilitation project.
- (b) **Single-family Residence**, 25 percent of the assessed value of the structure for the year the rehabilitation is to begin or \$50,000, whichever is less. The tax freeze shall not exceed eight years following completion of the rehabilitation project.

A copy of the Tax Freeze Ordinance and specific requirements are available in the Planning Division.

The usual steps for applying for a tax freeze are as follows:

1. *Submission of Plans.* Submit plans for restoration in the form of the Commission's Application for Design Review, along with the fully documented and completed Landmark Nomination Materials if the property is not already designated, to the Planning Division by the last Thursday of the month.
2. *Landmark Commission Hearing.* Present your restoration plans, at the Landmark Commission meeting, where they will be reviewed along with the Designation Nomination, if property is undesignated. If the Landmark Commission approves the plans, the recommendation is forwarded to the City Council.
3. *City Council Hearing.* The Council will act on the recommendation, and if approved, the tax freeze will be granted and work may begin. Should the restoration not exactly follow the proposed plans or not begin within six months, the tax freeze will be revoked.

If a property is known to meet the criteria for significance but cannot be designated a LANDMARK because of its deteriorated conditions or because it requires restoration of important historical features, "pending designation" status may be granted during the approved restoration period. An owner should ask for a Preliminary Hearing with the Commission for advice *before* Landmark Nomination or Design Review materials are completed and submitted or before any work is begun.

➤ MAINTAINING A DESIGNATED LANDMARK

Once a property has been officially designated by the City Council as a WICHITA FALLS LANDMARK or HISTORIC DISTRICT, the ordinance requires that the owner(s) maintain the landmark in good condition & that any *plans* for improvements or changes to the property other than ordinary repair and maintenance *must* be approved as appropriate by the Landmark Commission through the City's Design Review process. Application materials for Design Review are available on the City's website or in the Planning Division office

➤ WHEN IS A LANDMARK A LANDMARK?

A Historic Preservation Ordinance guarantees our right to protect and bring recognition to that part of our City's heritage, which has broad meaning for everyone. It provides for a very careful selection of properties officially designated as a "WICHITA FALLS LANDMARK". You may want to know how the Landmark Commission and City Council evaluate properties and the eligibility requirements.

➤ WHAT MAKES IT ELIGIBLE?

The first question to answer about a property's eligibility is,

"DOES IT REPRESENT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING THAT IS TRULY IMPORTANT OR UNIQUE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WICHITA FALLS - IS IT SIGNIFICANT IN THE HISTORY OF THE CITY?"

That is the strongest requirement set forth in the Historic Preservation Ordinance: it *must* meet one of the stated criteria for significance relating to history, architecture, archaeology, culture or geography and you will need to fully document that relationship in the application form.

The property may already have had a preliminary evaluation and be included in an architectural survey that was conducted for the City. The survey (*Historic Preservation Survey and Plan for Wichita Falls Texas* – May 1982) provides a list of properties that may be historically significant, and is available for reference in the Planning Division or at the Wichita Falls Public Library, in the reference section.

➤ WHAT IF IT HAS UNDERGONE CHANGES?

If you can document the significance of your property, the second question is, "**DOES IT STILL HAVE ITS BASIC HISTORICAL APPEARANCE AND CHARACTER, ITS ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRITY?**" The ideal, of course, is for a landmark to look *exactly* as it did originally - to *totally* retain its "architectural integrity" - but it may have undergone changes over the years. If these changes are part of its significant period, they are, of course, important in their own right. Otherwise, the extent and kinds of changes *may* affect the historic quality of a property and therefore its eligibility for designation.

With the Landmark Commission's guidance, however, sometimes simple corrections can be made so that it can qualify as a Landmark. Furthermore, the Commission can recommend "*pending designation*" status during more extensive (twenty-five percent of the assessed valuation or \$ 50,000, whichever is less) and *Commission-approved* restoration. This allows an owner to benefit from the *freeze* granted on local ad valorem taxes for a time period of between five and eight years after improvements on the landmark. ***It is very important that you consult with the Commission prior to doing any work.***

The list that follows is merely a summary of the Commission's criteria for evaluating the architectural integrity of structures, buildings, sites, and objects, and rules about changes that may have occurred. If you would like to see the complete Criteria of Evaluation, it is available in the Planning Division office.

The following changes to the *exterior* which were *not* a part of a property's significant period of architectural history are considered to be detrimental to good landmark preservation and therefore are *NOT RECOMMENDED* under the provisions of the Ordinance:

1. Major alterations to the facade or alteration of foundation, steps, or skirting.
2. Added architectural features which imitate an earlier or different period or style.
3. Removal of major architectural features, which gave it distinction.
4. Addition of metal, plastic, asbestos, or wood siding, or masonry, stucco, or textured material that covers the original facade.
5. Alteration of size and/or shape or blocking of openings such as windows, doors, or storefronts.
6. Enclosure of open porches or galleryways. (Certain glass-enclosure methods may be acceptable.)
7. Use of materials of unpainted or shiny metal or reflective or mirrored glass.
8. Roofing material dissimilar to the original in appearance.
9. Harmful surface treatment such as sandblasting or use of harsh chemicals.
10. Placement of utility equipment (including air conditioning/heating units, television transmission devices) or energy-conserving or security devices so that they obtrude on the street view.
11. Signs of inappropriate materials and color; signs on commercial structures which do not fit within features of its facade; signs on residential structures which have been put into commercial use, other than low monument-type signs; and signs internally lighted (except original neon signs).
12. Major or destructive alteration of the site or setting; or the addition of non-historic secondary structures (including fences such as chain-link, cement block, molded cement, rustic wood) or parking lots, which obtrude on the street view.

Also, if a structure, building, or object being proposed for LANDMARK designation has been moved, the terrain and location should be similar to the original setting.

Finally, of course, a property must be in a good state of repair to bear the official bronze marker proclaiming it a WICHITA FALLS LANDMARK and setting it out as an important part of our City's past.

➤ **WHAT IS THE OWNER'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR A DESIGNATED LANDMARK?**

Once a property is designated a Wichita Falls Landmark, it is protected from inappropriate changes or demolition through the Landmark Commission design review process required by the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and it is the owner's responsibility to seek such design review before any changes are considered.

➤ **WHO CAN HELP?**

You can stop by the Planning Division, Rm #400 of Memorial Auditorium or sit in on one of the Commission's regular meetings if you have any questions or even if you're just curious. The Commission's members are citizens like you, concerned about saving our precious assets, and they want to help you in any way possible.