

# Providence City Plan Commission

February 24, 2026



## AGENDA ITEM ■ CPC HANDBOOK AMENDMENT

### OVERVIEW

**PROPONENT:** Department of Planning and Development (DPD)

**RECOMMENDATION:** Recommend approval of the proposed amendment

**CASE NO./** CPC Handbook Amendment

**PROJECT TYPE:**

**PROJECT** Amendment of CPC POLICY No. 2: **PROJECT PLANNER:** Jason Martin

**DESCRIPTION:** CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE DESIGNATION OF LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT OVERLAY ZONES

### Discussion

The Commission has a long-standing policy entitled “POLICY NO. 2: CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE DESIGNATION OF LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT OVERLAY ZONES”. This policy was adopted in 1994 and is in need of revision. Staff has updated and streamlined procedures. The new procedures remove the creation of a Study Committee by the CPC and has the proponent working with the Planning Department and the Preservation Planner as to the required documentation, streamlining the process and requirements needed before introduction to the City Council and referral to the CPC. The process calls for the matter to be heard at one CPC meeting with notice given to property owners within the proposed area, and during which the CPC will make its recommendation.

The policy amendment is consistent with the goals of the Providence Comprehensive Plan’s Chapter Two, Built Environment, which commits to improving design standards and review of new development, encourages adaptive reuse of existing structures, encourages green building practices, and expands historic preservation efforts and Chapter Nine, which aims to promote and manage growth through land development, ensure the strength and stability of the City’s neighborhoods by directing growth to appropriate areas, and promoting a balance of uses to support sustainable patterns of development for a higher quality of life. The amendment also conforms to objective LU.9 of the plan which intends to promote design excellence and historic preservation through appropriate land controls.

### Recommendation

Based on the foregoing discussion, the DPD recommends that the CPC approve and adopt the amended policy.



**CITY OF PROVIDENCE**  
**MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY**

**POLICY NO. 2: CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE DESIGNATION OF LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT OVERLAY ZONES**

ADOPTED: 11/16/94, amended 02/24/26

**A. PURPOSE OF HISTORIC DISTRICT ZONING**

Under the Providence zoning ordinance, the purposes of historic district zoning are:

- 1) To safeguard the heritage of the City by preserving designated districts and structures of historic and architectural significance, which reflect elements of Providence's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history;
- 2) To stabilize and improve property values in the district;
- 3) To foster civic beauty;
- 4) To strengthen the local economy; and
- 5) To promote the use of the district for the education, pleasure and welfare of the citizens of Providence.

**B. DESIGNATION CRITERIA**

To be designated, a proposed historic district should meet at least one of the criteria in each of the following categories: significance, integrity, neighborhood support, and consistency with the City's planning efforts.

- 1) **Historic and Architectural Significance.** The proposed district contains structures, sites or objects, manmade or natural, which are:
  - a) included in or eligible for inclusion in the National and State Registers of Historic Places;
  - b) associated with broad patterns, events and/or people significant in local, state or national history;
  - c) representative of elements of architectural or landscape design or craftsmanship, which embody the distinctive characteristics of a type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, or method of construction or development;
  - d) representative of high artistic style and/or the work of a master builder, architect, landscape architect or other designer whose work influenced the development of the city, the state, the New England region, or the nation; or
  - e) lacking in individual distinction, but which add to the district's status as a significant indistinguishable cultural entity.
- 2) **Integrity.** The proposed district contains manmade or natural structures, sites or objects, most of which are in fair to excellent physical condition, which contribute to the historic character of the district because they retain their original or historic architectural design, materials and features. Where

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT**

JOSEPH A. DOORLEY JR. MUNICIPAL BUILDING, 444 WESTMINSTER ST, PROVIDENCE RI 02903  
PHONE 401.680.8400 | WWW.PROVIDENCERI.GOV/PLANNING

alterations have occurred they have been done in a manner sensitive to a property's historic and architectural significance.

3. Neighborhood Support. The proposed district has the documented support of the property owners within the boundaries of the proposed district. As a threshold, at least 50% of property owners within the proposed district should be in support of the designation.
4. Consistency with Planning Objectives. The proposed district meets the objectives, goals and policies of Providence's Comprehensive Plan.

#### C. SETTING DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

The following factors can help create easily understood and enforceable boundaries of the proposed district. In most cases it is preferable to:

- 1) draw boundaries to include properties fronting on both sides of a street; and,
- 2) provide a buffer zone recognizing the character and visual impact of areas contiguous to significant historic properties.

##### Historic Factors

- a) Boundaries of an original settlement or early planned community, as documented by historical research.

##### Visual Factors

- a) Boundaries drawn on the basis of an architectural or historic resources survey recognized as an official planning document.
- b) Boundaries related to changes in visual character, such as building forms, setbacks, and design features.
- c) Boundaries related to topography, particularly when the character or visual importance of the district is derived from its geographic location, such as a hillside.

##### Physical Factors

- a) Boundaries related to transportation facilities such as major highways or railroad lines.
- b) Boundaries related to major open spaces, such as parks, urban squares and cemeteries. It may be important to include the open space itself, to protect it as a historic and environmental resource.
- c) Boundaries related to waterways and other natural features. Wherever feasible, these edges should extend at least to the center line of a river or low water mark of a tidal watercourse and preferably include the opposite shoreline and a buffer zone beyond.
- d) Boundaries related to major changes in land use resulting in a change in visual character.

#### Surveyed Lines and Lines of Convenience

- a) Boundaries related to streets and other local rights-of-way, only if there is a marked change in use, building style, scale or form from one side of the street to the other.
- b) Boundaries related to rear property lines, particularly where lots are of a reasonable and fairly consistent depth.
- c) Boundaries related to uniform setback lines, where lots are of varying depth or of inordinate size.

#### Other Factors

- a) Boundaries relating to major redevelopment or public works projects planned within or contiguous to the district.
- b) Avoid drawing boundaries to exclude individual properties solely on the basis of owner objection, as the owner will benefit from the positive effects of the district without being subject to its controls.

#### D. DESIGNATIONS PROCESS

- 1) Designation is proposed by an individual, a neighborhood organization, a local preservation organization, the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), or a City Council representative by submitting an ordinance to the City Clerk, initiating a referral to the City Plan Commission (CPC).
- 2) Parties interested in proposing a local historic district or expansion shall consult with the DPD. The Preservation Planner will evaluate the proposed designation for eligibility and shall assist the interested party with:
  - a) Establishing the boundaries of the proposed district and map.
  - b) Preparing documentation to demonstrate how the proposed district meets the designation criteria.
  - c) Holding a public meeting in the designated area with notice sent to all property owners in the proposed district.
  - d) Seeking support from the City Council representative in whose ward the proposed district is located.
  - e) Gathering signatures from property owners within the proposed area.
  - f) Preparing a draft ordinance to amend the zoning ordinance and the official zoning overlay map(s). The ordinance may include an effective date for designation.
  - g) Preparing the public notice for the CPC and City Council meetings.
- 3) The Preservation Planner will coordinate with the proponent to have supporting documentation submitted before the matter is heard by the CPC. Supporting documentation shall include:
  - a) A photographic survey of all properties in the proposed district in compliance with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission's Statewide Survey Form. Photographs shall be 35mm or digital color prints,

showing direct and three-quarter views (both sides) of each primary structure on each lot in the district. Additionally, at least one overall context photo per lot shall show site features (such as fences and walls) and secondary structures (such as garages). Photos shall be labeled with street addresses and dated. Expenses for the survey shall be borne by the proponent. One complete set of the survey shall be donated to the DPD for use in administering the district should it be designated.

- b) Recommendation for the appropriate level of protection for the district, in consultation with the neighborhood along with appropriate standards and guidelines.
  - c) Preparation of appropriate draft design guidelines.
- 4) Written findings will be presented to the CPC at a public meeting, which will be noticed by mail seven days in advance to all property owners within the proposed district. The cost of this mailing will be borne by the proponent. After reviewing the study committee report, the CPC votes whether to support the proposed designation, and refers the matter to the City Council for its consideration.
- 5) The City Council's Ordinance Committee holds a public hearing to take comments on the proposed designation, including comments from the CPC. This hearing is noticed in the newspaper and by mail to all owners in the proposed district and abutters within 200' of the boundary. The cost of this mailing will be borne by the proponent. The Ordinance Committee then recommends action to City Council.
- 6) The City Council votes on the designation. If the ordinance passes two Council votes, and is then signed by the Mayor, the district is designated and the zoning ordinance and official zoning maps are amended.
- 7) At its next regular meeting after the designation is effective, the Historic District Commission votes to adopt design guidelines for the new district. Until that time, the Historic District Commission's duly adopted standards and guidelines will cover the new district.



# CITY OF PROVIDENCE

## MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY

### POLICY NO. 2: CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR THE DESIGNATION OF LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT OVERLAY ZONES

ADOPTED: 11/16/94, amended 02/24/26

#### A. PURPOSE OF HISTORIC DISTRICT ZONING

Under the Providence zoning ordinance, the purposes of historic district zoning are:

- 1) To safeguard the heritage of the City by preserving designated districts and structures of historic and architectural significance, which reflect elements of Providence's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history;
- 2) To stabilize and improve property values in the district;
- 3) To foster civic beauty;
- 4) To strengthen the local economy; and
- 5) To promote the use of the district for the education, pleasure and welfare of the citizens of Providence.

#### B. DESIGNATION CRITERIA

To be designated, a proposed historic district should meet at least one of the criteria in each of the following categories: significance, integrity, neighborhood support, ~~consistency~~, and consistency with the City's planning efforts.

- 1) Historic and Architectural Significance. The proposed district contains structures, sites or objects, manmade or natural, which are:
  - a) included in or eligible for inclusion in the National and State Registers of Historic Places;
  - b) associated with broad patterns, events and/or people significant in local, state or national history;
  - c) representative of elements of architectural or landscape design or craftsmanship, which embody the distinctive characteristics of a type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, or method of construction or development;
  - d) representative of high artistic style and/or the work of a master builder, architect, landscape architect or other designer whose work influenced the development of the city, the state, the New England region, or the nation; or
  - ~~e) lacking in individual distinction, but which add to the district's status as a significant indistinguishable cultural entity.~~
- 2) Integrity. The proposed district contains manmade or natural structures, sites or objects, most of which are in fair to excellent physical condition, which contribute to the historic character of the district because they retain their original or historic architectural design, materials and features. Where

#### DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

JOSEPH A. DOORLEY JR. MUNICIPAL BUILDING, 444 WESTMINSTER ST, PROVIDENCE RI 02903  
PHONE 401.680.8400 | WWW.PROVIDENCERI.GOV/PLANNING

alterations ~~have~~ ~~have occurred~~ ~~urred~~, they have been done in a manner sensitive to a property's historic and architectural significance.

3. Neighborhood Support. The proposed district has the documented support of the property owners within the boundaries of the proposed district. As a threshold, at least 50% of property owners within the proposed district should be in support of the designation.
4. Consistency with Planning Objectives. The proposed district meets the objectives, goals and policies of Providence's ~~2000: The Comprehensive Plan~~ ~~and its subsidiary plans, including A Plan for Preservation and any neighborhood plans duly adopted by the Commission and the City Council.~~

#### C. SETTING DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

The following factors can help create easily understood and enforceable boundaries of the proposed district. In most cases it is preferable to:

- 1) draw boundaries to include properties fronting on both sides of a street; and,
- 2) provide a buffer zone recognizing the character and visual impact of areas contiguous to significant historic properties.

##### Historic Factors

- a) Boundaries of an original settlement or early planned community, as documented by historical research.

##### Visual Factors

- a) Boundaries drawn on the basis of an architectural or historic resources survey recognized as an official planning document.
- b) Boundaries related to changes in visual character, such as building forms, setbacks, and design features.
- c) Boundaries related to topography, particularly when the character or visual importance of the district is derived from its geographic location, such as a hillside.

##### Physical Factors

- a) Boundaries related to transportation facilities such as major highways or railroad lines.
- b) Boundaries related to major open spaces, such as parks, urban squares and cemeteries. It may be important to include the open space itself, to protect it as a historic and environmental resource.
- c) Boundaries related to waterways and other natural features. Wherever feasible, these edges should extend at least to the center line of a river or low water mark of a tidal watercourse and preferably include the opposite shoreline and a buffer zone beyond.
- d) Boundaries related to major changes in land use resulting in a change in visual

character.

#### Surveyed Lines and Lines of Convenience

- a) Boundaries related to streets and other local rights-of-way, only if there is a marked change in use, building style, scale or form from one side of the street to the other.
- b) Boundaries related to rear property lines, particularly where lots are of a reasonable and fairly consistent depth.
- c) Boundaries related to uniform setback lines, where lots are of varying depth or of inordinate size.

#### Other Factors

- a) Boundaries relating to major redevelopment or public works projects planned within or contiguous to the district.
- b) Avoid drawing boundaries to exclude individual properties solely on the basis of owner objection, as the owner will benefit from the positive effects of the district without being subject to its controls.

#### D. DESIGNATIONS PROCESS

1) Designation is proposed by an individual, a neighborhood organization, a local preservation organization, the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), or a City Council representative by submitting an ordinance to the City Clerk, initiating a referral to the City Plan Commission (CPC).

24) Parties interested in proposing a local historic district or expansion shall consult with the DPD. The Preservation Planner will evaluate the proposed designation for eligibility and shall assist the interested party with:

- a) Establishing the boundaries of the proposed district and map.
- b) Preparing documentation to demonstrate how the proposed district meets the designation criteria.
- c) Holding a public meeting in the designated area with notice sent to all property owners in the proposed district.
- d) Seeking support from the City Council representative in whose ward the proposed district is located.
- e) Gathering signatures from property owners within the proposed area.
- f) Preparing a draft ordinance to amend the zoning ordinance and the official zoning overlay map(s). The ordinance may include an effective date for designation.
- g) Preparing the public notice for the CPC and City Council meetings.

~~Designation is proposed by an individual, a neighborhood organization, a local preservation organization, the Department of Planning and Development, or a City Council representative~~3) The Preservation Planner will coordinate with the proponent to have supporting documentation submitted before the matter is

heard by the CPC. Supporting documentation shall include:

- a) A photographic survey of all properties in the proposed district in compliance with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission's Statewide Survey Form. Photographs shall be 35mm or digital color prints, showing direct and three-quarter views (both sides) of each primary structure on each lot in the district. Additionally, at least one overall context photo per lot shall show site features (such as fences and walls) and secondary structures (such as garages). Photos shall be labeled with street addresses and dated. Expenses for the survey shall be borne by the proponent. One complete set of the survey shall be donated to the DPD for use in administering the district should it be designated.
  - b) Recommendation for the appropriate level of protection for the district, in consultation with the neighborhood along with appropriate standards and guidelines.
  - c) Preparation of appropriate draft design guidelines.
- 4) Written findings will be presented to the [CPC](#) at a public meeting, which will be noticed by mail seven days in advance to all property owners within the proposed district. The cost of this mailing will be borne by the proponent. After reviewing the study committee report, the CPC votes whether to support the proposed designation, and refers the matter to the City Council for its consideration.

•

- ~~2) Within 30 days of the submission of a completed designation, the City Plan Commission shall appoint a study committee consisting of at least three (3) neighborhood property owners, a representative of the organization proposing the designation, and a representative of the Providence Preservation Society. The study committee will be chaired by a member of the CPC, and staffed from the DPD. The study committee may call upon other organizations such as the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission for advice. Nominations for the study committee may be submitted by the proponents of the designation.~~
- ~~3) Within 60 days of its establishment, the study committee will determine the preliminary eligibility of the proposed district for designation, using the criteria established by the CPC. The study committee will report its determination and the underlying reasons in writing to the CPC, which will schedule the matter for review at its next available regular meeting. Copies of this report will be made available to the sponsors of the designation, and the sponsors will be given seven days advance notice by mail of the meeting.~~
- ~~a) If the study committee finds the district ineligible for designation, the CPC may vote to reject the petition.~~

- ~~b) If the study committee finds the district eligible for designation, the CPC may vote to direct the study committee to proceed as outlined in step 4 below.~~
- ~~4) The study committee shall be responsible for producing documentation, informing the public, gathering support and recommending appropriate levels of protection. Although it is expected that the study committee will act in a timely manner, no specific time frame is mandated herein.~~
- ~~a) Establish the boundaries of the proposed district and prepare a map.~~
  - ~~b) Prepare documentation to demonstrate how the proposed district meets the designation criteria.~~
  - ~~c) Seek support from the City Council representative in whose ward the proposed district is located.~~
  - ~~d) Prepare a photographic survey of all properties in the proposed district. Photographs shall be 35mm or digital color prints, showing direct and three-quarter views (both sides) of each primary structure on each lot in the district. Additionally, at least one overall context photo per lot shall show site features (such as fences) and secondary structures (such as garages). Photos shall be labeled with street addresses and dated. Expenses for the survey shall be borne by the sponsor of the designation. One complete set of photographs shall be donated to the DPD for use in administering the district should it be designated.~~
  - ~~e) Arrange at least three (3) public informational meetings within the neighborhood where the proposed district is located. Meetings should be held at a location accessible to the public, such as a branch library or community center, not at a private home. Members of the Providence Historic District Commission shall be invited. All public information materials shall be reviewed by the PHDC staff prior to the meetings.~~
  - ~~f) Contact each property owner within the proposed district individually with information about the benefits and restrictions associated with historic district zoning. Commercial and residential tenants should also be contacted to ensure their awareness of the proposed designation. Contact may be made in person, by flyer, by mail, or other means. Consideration should be given to those persons for whom English is not a native language. Expenses for postage and copying shall be borne by the sponsor of the designation. All public information materials shall be reviewed by the PHDC staff prior to distribution.~~
  - ~~g) Recommend the appropriate level of protection for the district, in consultation with the neighborhood. For example, the district may be oriented to historic preservation, with the strictest level of control, where there is a high degree of historic and architectural significance and integrity. Districts with less significance or integrity may be oriented to neighborhood conservation, with less stringent controls.~~
  - ~~h) Prepare appropriate draft design guidelines. Guidelines may consider the economic status of property owners within the proposed district and the~~

~~availability of financial incentives to conduct restoration work.~~

~~5) The study committee presents its written findings to the City Plan Commission at a public meeting, which will be noticed mail seven days in advance to all property owners within the proposed district. Copies of the study committee report will be made available to the designation sponsors, and will also be available for review at the DPD. Additional copies may be made available to the public for purchase. After reviewing the study committee report, the CPC votes whether to support the proposed designation, and directs its comments to the City Council for its consideration.~~

~~6) The DPD prepares a draft ordinance to amend the zoning ordinance and the official zoning overlay map(s). The ordinance may include an effective date for designation.~~

~~7) The city council representative introduces the ordinance at a council meeting. The ordinance is referred to the Council's Ordinance Committee.~~

58) The City Council's Ordinance Committee holds a public hearing to take comments on the proposed designation, including comments from the CPC. This hearing is noticed in the newspaper and by mail to all owners in the proposed district and abutters within 200' of the boundary. The cost of this mailing will be borne by the proponent. The Ordinance Committee then recommends action to City Council.

69) The City Council votes on the designation. If the ordinance passes two Council votes, and is then signed by the Mayor, the district is designated and the zoning ordinance and official zoning maps are amended.

710) At its next regular meeting after the designation is effective, the Historic District Commission votes to adopt design guidelines for the new district. Until that time, the PHDC's Historic District Commission's duly adopted standards and guidelines will cover the new district.