



Welcome to Ellensburg's Historic Districts

PH-022

Community Development Department

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Welcome to Ellensburg! Whether you are in a building in the Downtown Ellensburg National Register District or the slightly larger Local Historic District, or a residential historic district (see attached map) you are part of the historic core of our vibrant city. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1966, created a National Register of Historic Places (National Register) that established five (5) broad categories of properties. These include buildings (e.g.; houses, barns, and commercial buildings), structures (e.g.; bridges, lighthouses), sites (e.g.; battlefields, trails), objects (e.g.; monuments, fountains, signs) and **Districts**. Federal law defines a **National Register District** as “a concentration or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects that are **united** by their history or aesthetics. The identity of a district results from the **interrelationship** of its resources.”

The National Register Listing of the Downtown Ellensburg Historic District was approved in 1977, as was a residential district, the First Railroad Addition Historic District (maps attached). The local Ordinance was passed in 1980 (codified in 2013 as ECC 15.280; formerly ECC 1.45.36(C) (1)). In 2001, Ellensburg became a Certified Local Government (CLG). CLGs are designated by the United States Department of the Interior, but administered through the State Historic Preservation Office; known in Washington State as the Department of Archaeology and Preservation (DAHP), located in Olympia. CLGs mean local communities are eligible for technical help and grant funding. They do many preservation related things in our city, including encouraging public participation in historic preservation activities and educational efforts.

In addition to National, State and Local Register protections, another valuable asset to downtown is the Main Street Program. Conceived by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980 and formally established in Washington State in 1984, “the Main Street Program has been helping communities revitalize the economy, appearance, and image of their downtown commercial districts using the successful Main Street Four-Point Approach®. Main Street is a comprehensive, incremental approach to revitalization built around a community's unique heritage and attributes. Using local resources and initiative, the state program helps communities develop their own strategies to stimulate long term economic growth and pride in the heart of the community - downtown” as the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation website notes. Currently, there are 32 Main Street Programs in the state. Besides Ellensburg, the closest participating communities include Cle Elum and Roslyn in Kittitas County, Yakima and Selah in Yakima County and Wenatchee and Chelan in Chelan County. The Ellensburg Downtown Association, 109 East 3rd St, 509-962-6246, is the local non-profit organization created by the Main Street program. It executes the Four-Point Program of Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Restructuring in Ellensburg that has been so successful in revitalizing downtowns across the nation. It is an award-winning organization with trained professionals who can provide valuable resources for local businesses and property owners in the downtown historic district.

Another important program for local property owners in Ellensburg's Historic Districts is the **Special Valuation for Historic Properties** (ECC 15.280.110). Qualified historic properties under Section 84.26 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) can receive this benefit for rehabilitation per the guidelines. This determination is made by the body created by the Local CLG: the Ellensburg Landmarks and Design Commission (LDC). This body serves as the local review board for all applications under this program.

The Code also has other sections pertaining to property owners in historic districts. ECC 15.280 states that the Landmarks and Design Commission, in addition to reviewing applications for Special Valuation for Historic Properties, shall review changes to landmarks register properties. ECC 15.280.090 states:

1. No person shall *alter*, repair, enlarge, newly construct, relocate, or demolish any registered *landmark*, or any property located within a *landmark district*, nor install any exterior sign pursuant to subsection (A)(2) of this section, without review by the *landmarks and design commission* and approval of a ***certificate of approval*** (COA).
2. This review shall apply to all exterior features of the property visible from a public *right-of-way*. This review applies whether or not a *permit* from the *City of Ellensburg* is required.
3. Review of *alterations* to Ellensburg *landmarks register* properties under this chapter is in lieu of design review required for both major and minor projects and sign review per ECC 15.210.050(B).

This process of **design review**, to quote the design standards booklet, "is a tool intended to ensure that new development in our community enhances the visual quality and identity of Ellensburg. [It] encourages new construction that respects the traditions of the past and promotes **sensitive** rehabilitation of older buildings in our historic districts." Of critical importance is the historic districts is the **preservation** of as much of the original fabric of historic structures as possible. **Repair** of historic elements is preferred over replacement of them. Where the latter is necessary, compatible elements are crucial in order to protect and preserve the historic look and feel of buildings and protect the integrity of our historic districts.

In addition, while the Code does not regulate **interiors**, building owners are encouraged to retain, **restore** and maintain as much of the original interiors of historic structures as possible. The craftsmanship and materials used in many of these fine old buildings is often of a very high quality and it can be very cost-effective to restore interiors rather than replace them. Resources for effectively doing this are available from the Community Development Department. Remember, as noted above, **tax credits** are available for this and other types of work on historic structures, if done within the approved guidelines.

Building owners should contact the Senior Planner - Historic Preservation in the Community Development Department of the City of Ellensburg at 509-925-8608 for any questions relating to historic preservation or historic structures and **before any work** is done on historic structures (as per ECC 15.280). The department has many useful resources, including copies of the "Design Standards of the City of Ellensburg" for the use of the public. Applications for proposed work to the exteriors of historic buildings are also available. Staff stands ready to help in all aspects of owners' maintenance and preservation of buildings in Ellensburg's historic districts. Again, welcome to Ellensburg's Historic Districts!

