

What is the Historic Preservation Commission and Certified Local Government Program?

The historic preservation ordinance was approved by a local vote in 1990 and established the City's Historic Preservation Commission. The responsibilities of the commission include: identifying and designating structures or resources as local landmarks and historic districts; increasing public awareness of historic, cultural and architectural resources; reviewing all requests for Certificates of Appropriateness and making recommendations concerning the utilization of State, Federal or private funds to promote preservation of landmarks and historic districts within the city. The powers and duties of the Historic Preservation Commission can be found in Section 440 et. seq. of the City of Elmira's Zoning Ordinance.

The City of Elmira was designated as a Certified Local Government (CLG) in January of 2009 and is one of approximately 70 New York State communities in the program. The CLG program is administered by the NYS Division for Historic Preservation on behalf of the National Park Service. The main mission of the CLG Program is to work with local communities to develop and maintain local historic preservation programs critical to preserving historic properties that embody local history and character; and to ensure the broadest possible public participation in maintaining the preservation standards established by the Secretary of the Interior for rehabilitating and maintaining historic properties.

As a participant in the CLG Program, the City works with New York State Historic Preservation Office (SPHO) staff on National Register nomination process for properties in Elmira and other regional and statewide preservation goals. The CLG program also offers local governments grant funds to help put their ideas and objectives into action.

For more information contact: The Department of Community Development at 737-5691.

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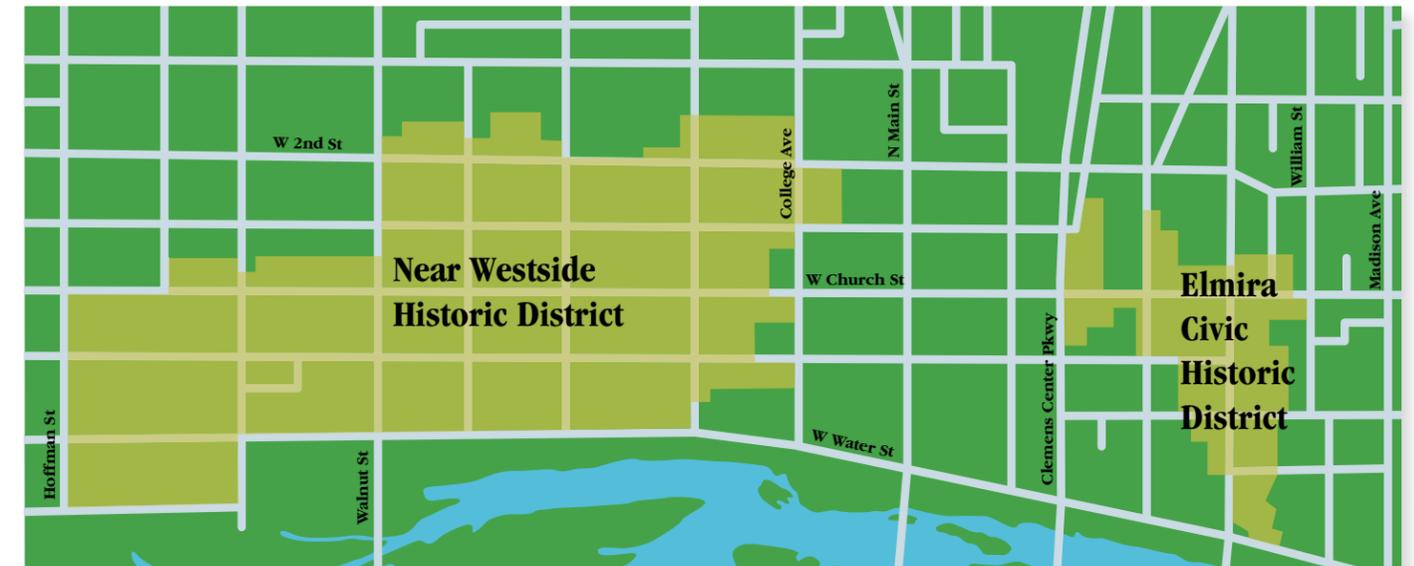
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Historic Preservation in the City of Elmira



Part of what makes one community unique from any other is its history. There is no better way to reflect history than to preserve the unique properties and places that are the physical components of that history. As stated in New York State's Historic Preservation Plan: "Historic and cultural resources tell the story of the community's development, stimulate community pride and reflection, and provide visual cues about the community's previous investments of capital, human resources and raw materials."

The City of Elmira is fortunate to have two locally-designated historic districts within its boundaries, the Near Westside Historic District and the Elmira Civic Historic District which are both shown on the map below.



The Near Westside Historic District

"The Near Westside Historic District is significant as a concentration of fine 19th and early 20th century architecture and for its association with Elmira's historical development.... The variety of architectural styles reflect the continued growth of the area and is a distinctive feature of the district.... This richness of detail, the juxtaposition of styles, and the remarkable integrity of the structures result in a distinctive historic ambience."¹

The Elmira Civic Historic District

"All the major architectural styles of the 19th and early 20th centuries are represented in the Elmira Civic Historic District, a clear reflection of Elmira's development during that period. A tiny landing on a swampy river in 1800, Elmira was the most important city in New York's Southern Tier by the end of the century. With this growth came the wealth and sophisticated tastes that are reflected in the fashionable residential, commercial and civic buildings of the historic district."¹

By establishing the preservation commission and designating historic districts and landmarks, the City of Elmira is able to guide growth and take advantage of the benefits of historic preservation. "Historic preservation can be a powerful economic engine, by creating more jobs, increasing tax revenue, raising property values, and encouraging community reinvestment. Historic preservation is much more than nostalgia; it is a powerful tool for economic development and community revitalization."²



Amot Art Museum, Elmira Civic Historic District

¹ The Gombach Group, Julia Gombach, Publisher, www.gombach.com

² "Strengthening Communities Through Historic Preservation," Washington State Historic Preservation Plan-2003, Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHPP).

Historic Review Process

The local designation of sites and historic districts sets in motion a review process focused only on proposed changes to a building's exterior. The purpose is to ensure the preservation of the architectural integrity of the designated building and the historic and cultural character of the site and/or district. In many cases, the commission can assist a property owner to find solutions to the challenges of working with historic buildings. If approved, the work receives a permit which is called a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA), described in detail below. A copy of the City's Zoning Ordinance, which contains the law regarding the Historic Preservation Commission and the Historic Review Process, can be found on the City's website at: www.cityofelmira.net.

What is a Certificate of Appropriateness?

A COA is a permit to allow the construction, alteration, or demolition of any property that has been individually listed at the local level, or is located within a local historic district. It is required.

To receive a COA, an application is first filed with the City's Division of Inspection Services. The department reviews for compliance all City and State codes, rules and regulations and will then refer the COA application to the Historic Preservation Commission for a Historic Review. The Commission meets twice a month and applications received will be reviewed at the bi-monthly meeting. The Commission will approve, deny, or approve with modifications within 30 days from the receipt of the complete application. Approvals are filed with the Elmira City Clerk's Office and expire 12 months from the date of the filing.

Additional information can be found on the City of Elmira's website at www.cityofelmira.net.

What Kind of Work Requires a COA?

Any alteration, restoration, construction, relocation or demolition of a structure that has been listed individually on the City Register of Historic Places and/or is located within a locally-designated historic district must be reviewed by the City's Division of Inspection Services and the Historic Preservation Commission prior to issuing a permit or a COA.³ This shall also include:

- New construction for residential and commercial buildings or outbuildings such as garages or sheds
- Reconstruction or moving of a building
- Additions to buildings
- Alterations of buildings including replacement of doors, windows and changes to exterior siding
- Repairs to or removal of exterior details
- Demolition of buildings or any portion thereof
- Signs for residential or commercial use
- Erection of fences and exterior lighting

Tax Credit Programs

Owners of residential and commercial properties that are listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places may qualify for income tax credits. There is a Federal Investment Tax Credit Program and a New York State Tax Credit Program. For more details on both programs please refer to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation at: www.nysparks.state.ny.us/sbpo/investment/index.htm



510 W. Church Street, Near Westside Historic District

What Kind of Work Does Not Require a COA?

A COA is not required for the following:

- Electrical, plumbing, heating and ventilation systems, provided they do not affect the exterior of the structure
- Painting
- Repair or partial replacement of porches, cornices, exterior, siding, doors, balustrades, stair or trim when the repair or replacement matches existing material and form
- Caulking, weather-stripping, glazing and repainting of windows
- Repair, replacement or installation of storm windows, provided they match the shape and size of historic windows and the meeting rail matches with the historic window—the color should match trim.
- Installation of new window jamb or jamb liners
- Repair or replacement of awnings when work closely matches existing materials and form
- Repair, replacement or installation of gutters and downspouts
- Installation of insulation where siding or trim is not altered or damaged
- Replacement of non-significant flat stock trim
- Repair or replacement of existing roads, driveways, sidewalks and curbs, provided that the work results in minimal changes in dimensions or configuration
- Exterior lead paint abatement that includes scraping and repainting of exterior work and masonry surfaces
- Repair or replacement of fencing when work closely matches existing
- Repair or replacement of water, gas, storm and sewer lines
- Emergency repairs necessitated by a casualty to the property due to fire, storm, or flood

How to Apply

Permit applications are obtained at the Elmira Fire Department Division of Inspection Services located at 101 W. Second Street. Properties which are listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places or are located in the historic districts will be given a COA application to complete. The following information is required and must accompany the application:

- Name, address and telephone number of applicant and owner
- Location and photographs of property
- Description of the proposed changes
- Elevation drawings of proposed changes (if applicable)
- Perspective drawings including relationship to adjacent properties (if applicable)
- Samples of colors and or specifications of the materials to be used
- Where proposal includes signs or lettering, a scale of lettering to be used, all dimensions and colors, a description of materials to be used, method of illumination and a plan showing the sign's location on the property
- Any information which the Commission may deem necessary in order to visualize the proposed work

For assistance contact: The Elmira Division of Inspection Services at (607)737-5653.



506 W. Water Street, Near Westside Historic District

³ Projects impacting properties listed individually or located in districts listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places may also be reviewed by SHPO staff only when state or federal funds are being used.