

Historic District webpage

The Willamette Historic District is a special zoning area designed to protect and preserve the architectural heritage of West Linn, now and for future generations. In recognition of the distinctive character and historic significance to the City and the State of Oregon, the Willamette Historic District was listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#) in 2009.

The district is notable because of it is an intact collection of Victorian and early-twentieth century American styles of architecture. The district's period of significance spans from 1895, when the first residences were built to 1929, when a majority of construction halted due to the onset of the Great Depression and dwindling numbers of buildable lots.

There are 38 historic designated properties in the Willamette Historic District. These properties are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of West Linn history and embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction significant at the turn-of-the century.

There are 26 buildings that are either noncontributing historic buildings or were built after the period of significance.

Properties within the historic district are subject to design review, which means that any exterior alterations made to the property must first be approved by the City. This is done to ensure that the historic quality of the buildings and the neighborhoods are maintained.

1) History of Willamette

a) Willamette Historic District

Willamette was platted in 1893 by Nicolas Walden as a speculative venture for the Willamette Falls Company. As a principal for the Willamette Falls Company, Walden helped plan one of the earliest fully electric and indoor plumbing communities. Historically known as Willamette Falls, the initial plat consisted of 17 rectangular blocks with 200 lots and bisecting alleys. Home construction began around 1895, with 18 homes built by 1900.

Located approximately two miles upriver from Willamette Falls and the Locks, Walden carefully chose the area for the new town for its proximity to one of the only sizable river landing areas above the Falls. Walden envisioned a fully modern port city to rival Portland with an electric trolley public transit, wooden sidewalks, an industrial railroad, modern, electrified homes, and indoor plumbing. Docks and a railroad were planned for the floodplain above the falls to transport goods from the Willamette Valley to Portland.

Walden died suddenly in 1897, leaving his vision of a port city unfinished. His death coincided with an economic recession. Subsequently, work on a planned railroad line and port ceased, and no further industrial expansion occurred. Competition from nearby, better-established towns further limited the town's development potential.

As the new century unfolded, Willamette Falls matured into a mill town, becoming increasingly populated by blue-collar workers employed by the Capen Shoe factory, the Willamette Falls Electric Company, and the paper mill. Many of the larger lots were subdivided to make room for new construction, accounting for the intermixing of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century housing types. Initially, residential development occurred primarily on the blocks from Sixth Avenue down to

Fourth Avenue, between 12th and 14th Streets. By 1900, there were seventeen residences located within this area. Commercial development settled along 7th Avenue (now Willamette Falls Drive).

1908, Willamette Falls was incorporated as the Town of Willamette. Due to persistent health problems with the town's water supply, Willamette was annexed into nearby West Linn in 1916. Although pausing momentarily around 1910, infill growth in the district continued at a slow but steady pace until the onset of the Great Depression. The residential construction continued between 1930 and 1950 but at a slower pace, reflecting the economic impact of the Depression and the lean years of WWII.

The Willamette Historic District is a collection of turn-of-the-century homes with a high level of historic integrity. There are two primary home types; those from the late Victorian era and those representing early twentieth-century America.

The district is especially significant for its concentration of intact Victorian-period residential architecture in the Stick and Queen Anne styles. Many of these buildings are simplified designs intended to imitate the high-style examples of the period. As was typical at the time, design elements of the Stick and Queen Anne styles are often combined on the same building.

The early twentieth century includes American Craftsman and Bungalow homes popular from 1900 to 1925. The bungalow style is most often communicated by wood trim and details. Although popular at the time, more expensive brick and stone were usually not used as a primary cladding or as an accent material. Because much of the development occurred before the increased automobile use, most houses have detached garages.

b) Historic Homes

The Willamette National Historic district boundary includes a portion of the Willamette Falls Plat historically associated with the Town of Willamette and the community's initial development period (1895 to 1929) that still retains sufficient historic integrity to merit listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Buildings are considered contributing to the district if they retained most of their original volume and details and either the original siding and/or the original windows. Buildings that do not have original windows or siding, or have a number of individual alterations that together cumulatively result in a general loss of integrity are considered non-contributing.

The district consists of six full and four partial city blocks and totals 64 resources. Thirty-eight of these buildings are contributing to the National Historic District and 26 are either non-contributing or were constructed outside the period of significance, 1895 -1929. There numerous homes that are eligible to contribute to the district.

Information on the properties that contribute to the Willamette Historic District can be found in the [virtual story map](#). An inventory of West Linn historic properties can be found on the [Oregon Historic Sites Database](#).

c) Historic Buildings

The City has 25 local landmarks located inside and outside the Willamette Historic District.

WEST LINN CITY LANDMARKS
Willamette Falls Locks (added 1974 - - #74001680) Built: 1873 West bank of the Willamette River
Willamette River (Oregon City) Bridge (No. 357) (added 2005 - - #05000639) Also known as Oregon City Bridge and Arch Bridge Built: 1922 Spanning the Willamette River on Oswego Hwy 3(Ore-43) between Oregon City and West Linn, Oregon City
West Linn Historic City Hall (added 2021 - - SG100007086) Built: 1936 22825 Willamette Drive
Crown Zellerbach Pulp & Paper Company (eligible/contributing) Built: 1888 Willamette Falls on west bank of the Willamette River
TW Sullivan Power Plant (eligible/significant) Built: 1895 Within Crown Zellerbach Pulp & Pare Company near Willamette Falls on west bank of Willamette River
Willamette Historic District (added 2009 - - #09000768) Also known as Willamette Falls Neighborhood Historic District Historical Significance 1895-1929 Willamette area of West Linn
Lewthwaite--Moffatt House (added 1994 - - #93001501) Also known as Lewthwaite,John,House Built: 4891 Willamette Falls Drive
Walden, Nicholas O., House (added 1984 - - #84002935) Built: 1897 1847 SE 5th Avenue
McLean House Built: 1927 5330 River Street
Sheriff Ernst T Mass House Built: 1906 1296 12 th Street
Mass House

Built: 1897 1492 13 th Street

2) Design Review Approval for Historic Properties

a) What is effect of being in a historic district on my property?

Having a property in a historic district is a source of pride and honor for many property owners. Historic district designation often encourages maintenance of properties because the investment is better protected over a long period of time. Owners know that the aspects that make a particular neighborhood special will be retained. Often property values stabilize or increase as a result of historic district designation.

Local historic districts were set up to protect the investment of owners and residents of historic properties and protect historic areas from loss of historic fabric. Research by the National Trust for Historic Preservation has found that local historic districts provide the following benefits to their community and to their owners and residents:

- Local districts encourage better quality design
- Local districts help the environment by conserving the resources they contain and contributing to neighborhood revitalization
- Local districts retain the important sense of place that makes a city unique
- Local districts enhance business recruitment potential
- Local districts can result in positive economic impact from heritage tourism
- Local districts provide a tangible link to the past; a way to bring meaning and history to people's lives.

b) Do we need approval to do exterior work on our homes?

Yes, properties within the historic district and historic landmarks throughout the City are subject to design review for most exterior work, which means that any exterior alterations made to the property must first be approved by the City. All exterior changes, including those not visible from the street must be reviewed. The historic design review process ensures that the historic quality of the buildings and the neighborhoods are maintained and that any modifications to the historic home retain the historic character and integrity that enabled their historic designation.

Minor revisions may only require Department staff review. More significant alterations are reviewed by the Historic Review Board.

Common projects that require historic design approval include:

- Replacing windows
- Replacing siding
- Reroofing
- Constructing or modifying a deck or a porch
- Demolition of any portion of the exterior of the home

c) Do we need approval to do interior work on our homes?

No. Historic Design Review does not apply to interior alterations. It only applies to changes in the exterior appearance of the property.

d) Should we talk to someone before we start planning our remodel or repair?

When considering any exterior project on a historic property, homeowners should contact the Planning Department at 503-742-6058 to find out about potential project requirements and approvals well in advance of making any decisions or financial commitments on a project.

e) Won't it be more expensive for me to repair or remodel my property in accordance with the Historic Preservation Code?

Not necessarily. There are a lot of choices and decisions when undertaking a home project. The Historic Code guides homeowners to approaches that preserve and restore the historic integrity of the home. There are many different materials and methods that may be used for most preservation projects. Repairs are preferable to replacement and are often less expensive.

There are some things that a property owner can do to ensure that they are getting the best advice and best price when repairing historic features.

First, it is important to get an estimate on the work from a contractor that has experience in working with historic buildings. Contractors without historic preservation experience typically recommend wholesale replacement of historic materials because they do not have an understanding of how they work or where to get them. Do some research to find good contractors. Start with asking neighbors and historic preservation groups.

Second, it is important to find companies that manufacture features that are compatible with historic buildings at reasonable costs. Start by reaching out to local businesses that focus on locally sourced historic materials.

Third, preservation isn't about the cheap quick fix; it involves investing in a property so that it will withstand the test of time. Investing in quality materials up front is often more cost-effective in the long run. After all, the wood windows in a historic home have probably been in service for over 100 years—and that is a pretty good return on the initial investment.

Additionally, the City offers grants from time to time to property owners to improve their historic property that can offset renovation costs. Call the Planning Department to find out about current programs, 503-742-6058.

f) How do we get an approval?

When considering any exterior work on a historic property, homeowners should contact the Planning Department at 503-742-6058 to find out about potential project requirements and approvals well in advance of making any decisions or financial commitments on a project.

There are two types of historic design review approvals, Class 1 and Class 2. Class 1 Historic Design Review projects are decided by the Planning Director. These projects are typically smaller in scale. Class 2 Historic Design Review projects are decided by the Historic Review Board at a public hearing. For Class 2 approvals, the applicant, or applicant representative, must present their request at a quasi-judicial hearing.

Historic Design Review Process:

- 1) A [pre-application conference](#) may be required for the project. The purpose of the pre-application conference is to provide information to the applicant on zoning, applicable substantive and procedural provisions of the CDC, technical data and assistance which will aid the applicant, policies and regulations that relate to the application, other pertinent factors that relate to the application, and rights for appeal and administrative procedures.
- 2) Once the homeowner has completed the pre-application conference, they should submit a [development review application](#) and narrative addressing the code requirements outlined in the pre-application conference to the City through the [Submit a Land Use Application](#) webpage. The City determine the fee and call the applicant to collect the application fee. The fee for alterations and remodels is \$100. The fee for new construction is \$1,500.
- 3) The planner will review the application to determine if it is complete. After the application is deemed complete, the planner will evaluate the request for compliance with the development code and prepare a staff report.
- 4) As part of the approval process, the City will mail a project notification requesting comments on the project to the respective Neighborhood Association and property owners near the historic home. The City will also post a sign on the property. Public comment on the project is encouraged and may influence the decision.
- 5) The decision body will consider all comments received and decide the application within 120 days of the determination of a complete application. The decision may be appealed by applicant or another party to the City Council.
- 6) Once the design review approval is final, the homeowner may apply for [building permits](#), if required. Questions regarding building codes should be directed to the Building Department at 503-742-6055.

g) Who reviews our projects?

Minor projects may be reviewed and approved by the City Planning Manager. More extensive projects are review and approved by the Historic Review Board.

h) What is the Historic Review Board?

The Historic Review Board is a seven-member volunteer board appointed by the City Council charged with reviewing applications in the Historic District or Historic Landmarks. Members of the HRB have a demonstrated interest, knowledge or competence in historic preservation and, to the extent possible, in one of the following fields: archaeology, architecture, building construction, history, landscape architecture, law, local history, real estate or urban planning. If possible, at least one member is an architect experienced in historic preservation. The majority of the members reside within the City. The HRB meets once a month in a hybrid meeting format on the 3rd Tuesday at 6 p.m. at City Hall.

i) Do we need to hire a professional to present our project the HRB?

It is not necessary to hire a professional to present a proposed project to the HRB, however it is important for either the homeowner or a representative to come to the HRB meeting to explain the project, show materials, and answer questions that may arise. If HRB Members have questions and no one is present to respond, the HRB may put off the decision about the project until the information can be provided.

j) What approval criteria apply to my project?

The City of West Linn implements historic preservation and design standards through Community Development Code (CDC) Chapters 25 and 58.

[CDC Chapter 25 \(Overlay Zones – Historic District\)](#) applies to all historic properties that are either individually listed or located within the boundaries of the Willamette Historic District.

[CDC Chapter 58 \(Willamette Falls Drive Commercial Design District\)](#) was adopted in 1992 and intended to revitalize the historic commercial district in the Willamette Neighborhood. The chapter includes design standards that reinforce the areas historic ties to the Willamette Neighborhood, and mandates the use of architectural styles of the 1880-1915 time period to compliment the Willamette Historic District.

k) May we add a new exterior addition to our historic home?

Maybe. The goal of City's historic preservation code is to ensure that changes to designated historic resources protect the integrity and the significant aspects of the historic resource and ensure compatibility and consistency with the qualities of the historic district its nomination was intended to preserve. Alterations, remodels, and additions must comply with applicable historic design review standards.

Additions located at the rear of a house may enable retention of historic features, size, scale, proportion, and massing of the historic house. Often they are separated from the historic residence with a connector, or a change in the height, but not pitch, of the roof. The connector or change in roof can help to delineate the original construction from the new addition.

l) Are there any property taxes reduction or credit or grants for my historic home?

[State Tax Incentive](#)

Oregon's Special Assessment of Historic Properties program offers a specially assessed value, calculated by the county assessor, to formally listed National Register properties for a 10-year benefit term. This program allows for a "freeze" of property taxes for a 10-year period prior to a substantial rehabilitation. The application for this program must be submitted BEFORE the rehabilitation work occurs on the property.

[Federal Tax Incentive](#)

Income producing properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places are eligible for a 20% Federal Tax Credit, provided the work follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Alternatively, commercial and industrial buildings that are not designated as historic and that were built before 1936 may be eligible for a 10% Rehabilitation Tax Credit. Interior and exterior work may qualify for the tax credit. This must be reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office for additional information.

Additionally, the City offers grants from time to time to property owners to improve their historic property that can offset renovation costs. Call the Planning Department to find out about current programs, 503-742-6058.

3) Repair/Restore/Replace

a) Important of preservation

Willamette is a unique community that boasts an extraordinary inventory of early 20th century housing. Original architectural features, streetscapes, plantings and vistas are all valuable components of the character of Willamette. Willamette homeowners take pride in maintaining and preserving their historic home.

Historic zoning helps maintain the neighborhood's character. Property owners are protected from inappropriate changes made by other owners that might destroy the special qualities of the neighborhood.

Your home contributes to the unique architectural character of Willamette. As a steward of your historic home, you'll want to ensure that the value of your home and of your community is upheld. You can start by paying close attention to the maintenance of some of the key exterior elements of your home – like windows, doors, siding, and roofing.

[Understanding key features of the architectural character of your home.](#)

b) Historic Architectural Styles

- [QUEENN ANNE](#)
- [STICK STYLE \(1860-1890\)](#)
- [CRAFTSMAN BUNGALOW](#)

c) Windows

Historic windows are one of the most important character defining elements of a historic house, and many of the replacement windows on the market simply don't reproduce the historic appearance and last as long as historic sash made of old growth wood.

The [recommendations of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings](#), encourage the preservation of original wood windows. Wood windows can be repaired and made weather-tight. When repair is not feasible, replacements may be approved, but on a window-by-window determination by the HRB.

Many windows on West Linn historic houses are double-hung with 1/1 light. They often have small rail extensions on the top sash. Some Queen Anne houses have multi-light windows or windows with art glass. Craftsman and bungalow style residences often have double hung windows with 9/1 lights.

d) Paint

While color is not part of the jurisdiction of the Local Historic District, interested homeowners find resources for historic building color palettes. Some online resources:

- [Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork](#)

- [Benjamin Moore - Historical Colors](#)
- [Sherwin Williams - Historic Collection](#)
- [Paint color do's and don'ts for historic houses](#)

e) [Siding](#)

f) [Roofs](#)

g) [Wooden Porches](#)

h) Garage Doors

i) [Energy Efficiency](#)

4) **Helpful Websites**

[West Linn Historic Society](#)

[Historic Willamette Main Street](#)

[Restore Oregon](#)

[Oregon SHPO](#)

[National Trust for Historic Preservation](#)

[National Park Service Preservation](#)

[The Preservation Directory](#)

[Period Homes Magazine](#)

[Old House Journal Magazine](#)

[Old House Interiors](#)

[This Old House](#)

[John Leek's Historic HomeWorks](#)