

Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries
Michigan Historical Center
State Historic Preservation Office

**Criteria for Evaluating Resources for
Inclusion in Local Historic Districts**

Legal Authority

Section 3(1) of Michigan's *Local Historic Districts Act*, 1970 PA 169 (MCL 399.203) states that counties, cities, villages and townships may, by ordinance, establish one or more local historic districts. The section further states that before a district is created, the legislative body of the local unit of government must appoint a historic district study committee. The section says that in evaluating the significance of historic resources to be included in districts, a committee shall:

"be guided by the selection criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the national register of historic places, as set forth in 36 C.F.R. part 60, and criteria established or approved by the department (of history, arts, and libraries), if any."

Applicable Definitions

The United States Secretary of the Interior promulgated a definition of the word "district" at 36 C.F.R. § 60.3, as follows:

"A district is a geographically definable area, urban or rural, possessing a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development. A district may also comprise individual elements separated geographically but linked by association or history."

Section 1a(i) of the *Local Historic Districts Act* (MCL 399.201a) indicates that the term "historic district" means:

“an area, or group of areas not necessarily having contiguous boundaries, that contains 1 resource or a group of resources that are related by history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture.”

Criteria for Historic District Boundary Determinations

The criteria that a historic district study committee must apply when determining the historic significance of historic resources and the boundaries of historic districts are the criteria and considerations developed by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for the creation of historic districts, as set forth in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria* (pp. 5-6), *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form* (pp. 56-57), and *National Register Bulletin 21: Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties* (p. 2) [see Appendix].

Criteria for Establishing Single Resource Districts

The criteria that a historic district study committee must apply when establishing a single resource district are those set forth in the preceding paragraph, plus the criteria set forth below.

A single resource historic district in Michigan is one in which the single resource individually meets the criteria for eligibility established by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places on its own merit for:

Criterion A: Association with a significant person

Criterion B: Association with a significant event or pattern of history

Criterion C: Design and construction

Criterion D: Information potential

In other words, boundary selection is based on the nature of the resource's significance, integrity, and physical setting. However, a district is seldom defined by the limits of current parcels of ownership, management, or planning boundaries. The boundaries must be based upon a shared relationship among the properties constituting the district.

Examples of single resource historic districts would be: a county courthouse; a fire station; an armory; an isolated, intact farmstead; a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright; the summer cottage of Ernest Hemmingway; or the first automobile plant where Henry Ford utilized mass production techniques.

Accordingly, a single resource historic district must be distinguishable from the surrounding resources in the immediate vicinity by virtue of geography, historic significance, or integrity.

Therefore, a single resource historic district **cannot**:

- share its significance of historic development or association with surrounding resources. If the resource does share those characteristics with surrounding resources, then the single resource district cannot stand alone and must be included as part of a larger district. Examples of inappropriate and thus impermissible single resource districts include one bungalow in the middle of a neighborhood of bungalows, or one Queen Anne or Italianate house in a larger neighborhood of Victorian style homes.
- be a commercial building, separated from a larger commercial district by demolition or new infill, if the building does not meet the National Register criteria on its own merit.
- be one contributing resource in a National Register of Historic Places designated district, if the resource does not individually meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Register.
- be based solely on property ownership.
- be based solely on the consent of property owners.

Single resource historic districts that the Michigan Historical Center determines to be inappropriately designated will not qualify for the state historic preservation tax credit.

Boundary Description

Each historic district study committee must issue reports. The historic district study committee report must include a written boundary description that is a legal description. Examples include: a legal parcel number; block and lot number; metes

and bounds; or the dimensions of a parcel of land, reckoning from a landmark, such as a natural or cultural feature.

Boundary Justification

A historic district study committee report must also include a boundary justification statement. The boundary justification statement shall be a brief and concise explanation of the reasons for selecting the proposed historic district boundaries. Each directional boundary shall be individually addressed in the boundary justification statement. A boundary's justification must be based on physical geography, historic significance, or physical integrity.

Photographic Documentation for Single Resource Districts

Streetscape photographs showing the resources located on both sides of the block on which a single resource district is being designated must be included with the historic district study committee report.

Additional Information and Questions

Requests for additional information, as well as questions about the criteria listed here, may directed to:

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Approvals and Issuance*

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Established and Issued: August 19, 2002
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Appendix

National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria states:

“A district possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development.”

A district derives its importance from being a unified entity, even though it is often composed of a wide variety of resources. The identity of a district results from the interrelationship of its resources, which can convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment or be an arrangement of historically or functionally related properties. “ (p. 5)

“A district . . . is seldom defined, however, by the limits of current parcels of ownership, management, or planning boundaries. The boundaries must be based upon a shared relationship among the properties constituting the district.” (p. 6)

National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form discusses in detail how criteria are to be applied, and states:

“A district must be a definable geographic area that can be distinguished from surrounding properties by changes such as density, scale, type, age, style of sites, buildings, structures, and objects or by documented differences in patterns of historic development or associations. It is seldom defined, however, by the limits of current parcel ownership, management, or planning boundaries. The boundaries must be based upon a shared relationship among the properties constituting the district.” (p. 56-57)

Bulletin 21: Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties states that boundary selection is “based on the nature of the property’s significance, integrity and physical setting.” Therefore, an individual property located within a larger area that meets the criteria for a multi-resource district, should not be singled out for designation as a single resource district. (p. 2)