Greater Portland Landmarks is a community nonprofit, not affiliated with the City of Portland. Through our research and neighborhood architectural survey, we are exploring the potential of historic preservation designation as one of several tools to address the concerns we have heard from many neighbors on Munjoy Hill. Local historic districts in Portland help conserve our diverse, pedestrian-friendly, historic neighborhoods while managing necessary change, including the introduction of additional housing units. Portland’s Historic Preservation ordinance is a proven tool that addresses the conservation of historic neighborhood character through demolition review, the review of alterations to existing buildings, and review of proposals for new construction in historic districts.

What would a Historic District Mean on Munjoy Hill?

Established in 1990, the Historic Preservation Ordinance is managed by the City’s Planning Department. Minor changes are reviewed by staff only. Larger alterations are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Board.

* **You do not have to make home improvements when you are in a historic district.**
* **Only exterior changes visible from the street or public way are regulated under the Historic Preservation ordinance.** The ordinance does not apply to interior changes or to the use of a particular building.
* **In kind replacements are allowed.** So if a building is already vinyl sided it can be replaced in kind or upgraded. Likewise, if there are already replacement windows they can be replaced in kind or upgraded.
* **Paint colors are not regulated.** Buildings that have been painted can be painted any color, but an exterior that has never been painted before (e.g. an unpainted brick building) will not be allowed to be painted.
* **Alterations and additions are allowed in a historic district.** New additions, dormers, decks, solar panels, and garages have been approved in Portland’s historic districts. Minor changes are reviewed by staff while larger alterations are reviewed by the board.
* **Demolition can and does occur in a historic district**. In a district, a non-contributing building may be demolished by right without board approval. The ordinance has an appeals process for demolition of a Contributing or Landmark building with no reasonable use or unsound structure.
* **Inclusion of a building in a historic district will not trigger re-assessment nor cause it to be singled out for additional taxes.** Re-assessment occurs periodically on a city-wide basis.

* **It is not necessarily more expensive to repair or remodel a home if it’s in an historic district.** There are many different methods and material options for preservation projects. The ordinance includes language like “when feasible,” and the historic preservation board will consider cost and possible alternatives.

 Why is Munjoy Hill Historically Significant?

For over a century, Munjoy Hill was the city’s most densely populated and ethnically diverse neighborhood. It developed during three primary periods of construction. The first was in the 1840s-1850s when industrial activity on the waterfront led to a residential boom on the Hill, attracting workers from the Portland Company and the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad. The second major building period occurred in the years following the Great Fire of 1866 when the Hill was an attractive and safe place to rebuild away from the downtown’s industrial and commercial activity. The last major development period was at the turn of the 20th century when dense housing forms like triple-deckers and apartment blocks were built to house Portland’s growing immigrant population. Landmarks’ recent architectural survey of over 750 properties shows that at least 2/3 of the buildings contribute to the neighborhood’s historic character.

Benefits of a Local Historic District

* **Historic Preservation is about keeping buildings alive, in active use, and relevant to the needs of the community.** To best accomplish this, zoning and building regulations need to be flexible and responsive to change even as they try to preserve what is special about each building.
* **Local districts can protect a property owner’s investment**. Regulations are intended to prevent the demolition or inappropriate alteration of historic properties, and thus, the fabric of the historic district that gives properties their value. They offer predictability for residents and for those considering investing in the community.
* **Local districts help tell the story of our city in all its complexity and diversity.** No one would argue that certain historic districts feature grand historic homes. But historic districts also celebrate modest buildings that have been home to generations of working families. The history embedded in these communities is just as important, and just as worthy of full preservation efforts.
* **Local districts give communities a voice in their future.** By participating in the Historic Preservation Board public process, citizens can influence their communities’ development. Making these decisions together in a structured way―rather than behind closed doors or without public comment―gives everyone involved a sense of empowerment and confidence.
* **Local districts allow density without demolitions of historic houses.** New construction, accessory dwelling units, additions, and new housing units within existing houses, are all ways that a historic district can offer more housing options, without destroying the history, beauty, integrity, and urban tree canopy of these neighborhoods.
* **Local districts encourage quality design.** Good design can produce a greater sense of cohesiveness, more innovative use of materials, and greater public appeal―all of which are shown to occur more often within designated districts than non-designated ones.
* **Historic Preservation is a sustainable practice and Portland’s ordinance allows for the use of renewable energy technologies.** Portland’s Historic Preservation Board reviews the use of renewable-energy technologies on a case by case basis and has approved the use of solar panels in local historic districts.