



SO YOU WANT TO NOMINATE A HISTORIC DISTRICT... RECOMMENDATIONS ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT DURING THE NOMINATION PROCESS

WHY...

One of the most important parts of preparing a nomination for listing a historic district in the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places is public engagement.

- A majority of property owners within the proposed district must support the nomination or it cannot proceed.
- Others who may be affected by the nomination, such as local business employees, community organizations, and rental property residents, also are entitled to be informed about plans concerning the proposed district.

HOW...

DHR requires that applicants develop strategies for public engagement at the beginning of their historic district project. More or different strategies can be added as the project proceeds. This allows you to:

- Start gauging public support for the historic district designation before expending substantial time, work, and/or financial resources.
- Collect information from long-time residents about the district's history and changes over time.
- Learn more about individual properties within the district.
- Identify funding sources for your project, if you have not already done so.
- Get to know your neighbors!

WHO...

DHR's [Regional Preservation Offices](#) are available to advise you on the most effective ways to engage the public during your nomination project.

- DHR maintains three regional offices:
 - Western region, located in Salem
 - Northern region, located in Stephens City, Frederick County
 - Eastern region, located in Richmond.
- Each office offers technical information and guidance on the full range of DHR's statewide programs.
- Contact information and service areas for DHR's three regional offices are available at <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/about-dhr/regional-preservation-offices/>.
- DHR also generally advises historic district applicants to work with professional consultants who have expertise in Virginia's history and architecture as well as the nomination process. DHR offers a [directory](#) of consultants that lists their contact information and areas of expertise.

WHEN...

Historic district nomination projects generally consist of three broad tasks. Public engagement should be incorporated in each one:

- **TASK ONE:** Preparation of a [Preliminary Information Form](#) (PIF) and submission to the appropriate Regional office. DHR will use this form to evaluate the proposed district's eligibility for the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places.



- Start educating residents, property owners, and the public at large about the proposed district and the reasons Register listing is being pursued.
- Since many local governments have specialized staff who can provide technical assistance and you should find out what that might include. Good places to start include the administrator's, planning and tax assessor's offices.
- Currently, 36 of Virginia's local governments are [Certified Local Governments](#) (CLGs) with dedicated historic preservation staff. If your district is within the jurisdiction of a CLG, you should contact the preservation staff for assistance.
- Local government elected officials also should be informed about the proposed district.
- **TASK TWO:** If the historic district is found to be eligible for the Registers, then the next step is completion of a comprehensive [survey](#) of all architectural resources within the district boundaries.¹
 - Before the survey starts, reach out to all segments of the general public (residents, businesses, community groups, property owners) within the proposed district boundary to inform them about when the survey will take place, who will be conducting the survey, and the kinds of information that will be recorded. Easy ways to do this are provided in the list at the end of this guidance document.
- **TASK THREE:** After the survey is completed and approved by DHR, a [nomination](#) for the historic district is prepared.
 - DHR will review the nomination and, upon finding that it is complete, will schedule it for presentation to the Virginia State Review Board and the Board of Historic Resources.
 - DHR will conduct a formal notification and public hearing process with your assistance after the nomination has been scheduled for presentation to the Boards.

WHAT...

What are your options for public outreach and engagement?

- DHR's [Regional Preservation Offices](#) will provide you with guidance on which options are appropriate for your particular district.
- Local government staff, particularly in the planning and tax assessor's offices, can help you with creating a map of your proposed district, a list of property owners, and even assistance with finding appropriate public meeting space.
- Professional [consultants](#) also can be contracted to assist you with strategies for public outreach.

¹ . Note that archaeological sites can be included in a historic district too. DHR staff will provide detailed guidance on whether this is appropriate and how to document these sites.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Following is a list of activities, in no particular order, that applicants have used for their historic district nomination projects. Consult with your [Regional Preservation Office](#) staff member for guidance on the best approaches for your district. DHR requests that documentation of outreach activities be provided to the Regional Office.

- Contact local elected officials to explain what you want to accomplish by nominating a historic district to the Registers.
- If a local association (neighborhood, business owner, civic, etc.) represents all or part of the proposed district, contact each one to see if you can present your district project to their members.
 - This is also a great opportunity to ask organization staffs and memberships if they have any information about the district's history, including historic photos.
- Door-to-door canvassing of each property within the proposed district to inform residents, business owners, and organizations about the district proposal.
NOTE: Posted "no trespassing" signs must be obeyed.
- Mail a postcard or flyer about the district proposal to all affected property owners and residents within the proposed district.
 - DHR can provide guidance on content and format.
 - The U.S. Postal Service offers assistance for compiling mailing addresses through their [Every Door Direct Mail](#) service.
 - Numerous private companies also can be contracted to conduct mass mailings.
- Develop an information flyer that can be handed out during canvassing or other public outreach activities.
 - DHR can advise on content and format of the flyer.
- Train survey staff about the district project, including the sponsoring organization and reasons that the district nomination is being prepared; also encourage survey staff to engage with property owners and anyone curious about what they're doing and why.
 - DHR can provide survey staff with training on how to explain typical goals of architectural survey and why this is required as part of the district nomination process.
- Submit an article about the proposed historic district nomination for publication in a neighborhood newsletter and/or online publication.
- Set up an information table and/or have brochures/postcards available at a community event.
- Send out a press release about the district proposal to generate interest from local media outlets.
 - Many local feature reporters stay on the lookout for fresh special-interest stories.



- Don't forget about local radio stations, including commercial, nonprofit, college, and volunteer-run stations.
- Ask for permission to place posters or flyers on community message boards at local businesses, public libraries, community meeting facilities, churches, and other community-oriented venues.
- Attend a city council/county board of supervisors meeting to inform elected officials of the historic district proposal.
 - If the historic district is within an incorporated Town, then attending a Town Council also is warranted.
- Create a social media page, blog, or website dedicated to informing owners about the proposed district.
 - Post updates as work on the project proceeds, from submission of the Preliminary Information Form to the hoped-for listing in the Registers.
 - Add information about your proposed district's history, including historic photographs, maps, and other images.
 - Ask readers to submit their own images and content.
 - Take advantage of crowdsourcing by including a "who is it?/what is it?" feature for identifying unknown people, events, and places in historic photos.
- Ask managers of community blogs and websites to post information about the proposed district, such as a flyer or press release.
 - Websites managed by civic associations, neighborhood associations, local government entities, homeowners associations, and other community-oriented groups are all appropriate.
- Ask managers of community social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to post information about the proposed district.
- If you have other ideas for effective public engagement, please let us know!