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Design guideline update coming to the South Portland Historic District

News Article

Metro grant will fund needed refresh of Portland's oldest set of design guidelines.

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The City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability will work with community partners over the next 18 months to update the design guidelines that apply to alterations, additions, and new construction in the South Portland Historic District. The guideline update will be made possible by a Metro 2040 Planning and Development grant, which will support a variety of land use plans and community development [projects in 2019-20](#). The plans will support the growth of complete and inclusive communities throughout the Southwest Corridor. The updated historic district design guidelines will be reviewed at public hearings before the Historic Landmarks Commission and City Council before adoption in early 2020.

What are design guidelines?

Design guidelines provide clarity to property owners, designers, architects, and developers on the expected architectural character of alterations, additions, and new construction in historic districts and design overlay zones. For historic districts, design guidelines are land use approval criteria that must be met for any activity that is subject to City of Portland Historic Resource Review. Although not all historic districts have district-specific design guidelines, Portland's 2035 Comprehensive Plan provides policy direction for the development of district-specific guidelines tailored to the unique physical attributes of each historic district. A recently-adopted example is the [Skidmore-Old Town Historic District Design Guidelines](#).

The South Portland Historic District

In 1977, the Portland City Council created the Lair Hill Conservation District to "encourage the conservation and maintenance of the historical and architectural integrity of the district." In 1998, the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability expanded the boundaries and elevated the designation type

of the conservation district to become the [South Portland Historic District](#). According to the historic district nomination form, South Portland is “locally significant under [National Register of Historic Places] Criterion A as a former gateway for ethnic groups arriving in the city of Portland, representing, in particular, Jewish and Italian immigrants. It also meets [National Register of Historic Places] Criterion C as a neighborhood that exemplifies the characteristics of modest Victorian style architecture.” The 49-acre district includes approximately 175 ‘contributing’ historic buildings.

The Portland City Council adopted design guidelines for the [Lair Hill Conservation District](#) in 1980. While the 1980 guidelines are still used as approval criteria, they only apply to the geography of the former (and smaller) conservation district, do not represent modern best practice for City of Portland design guidelines, and lack context and criteria related to the district’s multi-ethnic historic significance. The design guideline update will build upon the 1980 guidelines and 1998 historic district nomination to provide greater historic resource protection and development clarity in the South Portland Historic District prior to possible future construction of light rail through the district.

Seeking professional services from historic preservation consultants

Historic preservation and urban design consultants are invited to submit bids to the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to bring outside professional expertise to the design guideline project. Because of limited staff capacity and the urgency of using grant funds, outside consultant participation will assist in drafting written content and graphic elements for inclusion in the design guideline document. Bids for professional services are due January 17, 2019 through the [City of Portland’s vendor portal](#).

Get involved in a new community workgroup

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability will assemble a community work group to assist in the development of the South Portland Historic District design guidelines. Representatives from the Bureau of Development Services, Historic Landmarks Commission, South Portland neighborhood, and other interested parties will inform City staff and professional consultants as decisions are made regarding contextual information and approval criteria to include in the design guidelines. Regardless of your expertise with historic preservation or the South Portland Historic District, if you’re interested in participating in the work group, please send an email to Historic Resources Program Manager Brandon Spencer-Hartle at historic.resources@portlandoregon.gov by February 14, 2019.



Vance Land Company Warehouse, a 1913 building in the South Portland Historic District.