

Frequently Asked Questions about the National Register of Historic Places

What are the benefits of registration?

Registration is an honor bestowed on historic properties by state & federal governments. It recognizes the historic value of a property and encourages present & future owners to exercise good stewardship. Owners of registered properties may donate historic preservation easements, qualify for state & federal rehabilitation tax credits, receive technical assistance from department staff for certain projects, & purchase plaques marking the property's significance.

Will registration affect the ability to alter or tear down properties?

Not as a result of registration. Property owners who donate preservation easements, participate in the federal or state tax credit programs, or accept a federal or state rehabilitation grant must abide by certain restrictions on alterations or demolitions associated with those programs. Otherwise, only local building codes & permit requirements must be met, as with any property.

Will registration or listing increase or decrease property values and tax burdens?

Many factors affect the value of real estate: location, improvements, supply & demand, zoning, surroundings, local & national economic conditions, business cycles, & actions of national, state, and local governments. Changes in any of these factors may increase or decrease the value of property. Registration per se appears to have little effect, although one would expect well-kept, attractive, older properties and neighborhoods to experience rising values over the long run.

Can a property be nominated individually if it is within a district?

Yes. However, property owners in districts already can receive the same benefits as owners of individually listed properties. In other words, if a property is listed as a contributing structure within the district, it is already "just as registered" as if it were listed individually.

How are decisions made about what gets listed?

The process consists of evaluation and nomination. During the evaluation phase, preliminary information about the property is examined by the Department of Historic Resources regional office and the National Register Evaluation Committee, which then recommends to the State Review Board properties that appear to meet the criteria for registration. Once the evaluation phase is completed, the nomination phase usually results in the listing of qualified properties.

Isn't it true that only sites associated with famous people or events get registered?

No. The register criteria apply to places of local as well as national or state significance. Many places are listed because they exemplify themes or architectural styles important in local history.

If property is listed in the national or state registers, will it be protected from undesirable development or destruction by government projects?

Not necessarily. Only easements protect property in perpetuity. Registration informs owners, planners, governments, & others involved in land-use planning of the existence of a historic resource. Neither the National Historic Preservation Act nor the *Code of Virginia* requires property owners, developers, or governments to avoid affecting or destroying historic resources. The National Historic Preservation Act does require that federal agencies take historic resources into account when planning projects. State and federal agencies often work around historic property or mitigate the effects of a project on the property. In most cases, the federal or state project usually proceeds even if it affects or destroys the resource. In some instances, the force of public opinion has persuaded developers or government agencies to spare a registered property.

Some properties are included within the boundaries of a historic district even though the property is too new to be historic. Why can't it just be left out of the district?

The concept of a district precludes its looking like a slice of Swiss cheese. District boundaries are drawn to include the highest concentration of resources that contribute to the significance of the district, but there will often be properties within the district that do not contribute to it. (For instance, a historic farm complex is likely to have modern structures that do not contribute to the significance of the complex.) These properties are included within the district boundary but are recorded as noncontributing. This has the same effect as "leaving them out" without compromising the integrity of the district as a whole.