

# WHAT ARE LANDMARK DESIGNATION CRITERIA?

*Technical Paper No. 5*



**King County**

Historic Preservation Program, Department of Natural Resources and Parks  
201 S. Jackson, Suite 700, Seattle, WA 98104 | 206-477-4545 | TTY Relay: 711

## **Background**

King County keeps a roster of landmark properties which have been found to be significant to local, state or national history. The roster is maintained by the King County Historic Preservation Program, and is expanded through nominations of historic properties by individuals, community organizations, and local governments. Specific criteria are considered by the Landmarks Commission at a public hearing in order to determine whether a nominated property qualifies for designation.

## **Some Introductory Questions**

***What kinds of properties can be designated as landmarks?*** Landmark properties include buildings and structures such as houses, commercial buildings, and bridges; sites, such as parks and archaeological sites; districts, or groups of buildings, structures, objects, or sites that make up a coherent whole, such as a residential neighborhood or an industrial complex; and objects - not portable museum objects, but large movable properties such as railroad cars, fountains and monuments.

***What kinds of significance must properties have in order to be designated?*** Historic properties important in history, prehistory, architecture, engineering, archaeology, or culture may be designated as landmarks. In other words, a property associated with the history of a community may be listed, and so can a prehistoric archaeological site, an exceptional example of an architectural style, building type, landscape design, or engineering; or a place of continuing but traditional cultural importance to a community (e.g., a place associated with a Native American tradition or a well-preserved rural landscape).

***What level of significance must a property have in order to be designated?*** The landmark roster includes properties determined to have significance at either the local, state, or national level. In other words, although the landmark program is "local", it is designed to include properties of national importance. A general store, a community park, a main street, or an archaeological shell midden may be just as eligible for landmark designation as the King County Courthouse or Snoqualmie Falls.

## **The Criteria**

The designation criteria are designed to guide the King County Landmarks Commission and members of the general public in evaluating properties for landmark eligibility. Decisions concerning the significance and integrity of historic properties can be made only when the criteria are applied within related historical contexts.

An historic resource may be designated as a King County Landmark if it is more than forty years old or, in the case of a landmark district, contains resources that are more than forty years old, and possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:

*A1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local, state or national history;*

This means that a property can be designated if it is associated with a particular event - for example, the founding of a community, or an invention - significant in history at the local, state, or national level. It also means that a property can be designated if it is associated with a series of events or processes that have been significant parts of "broad patterns" of local, state, or national history. Examples of the latter might be the economic growth or decline of a community during a particular period, the development of a transportation or communication system, a pattern of agricultural land use, or a period of prehistoric, environmental, or cultural change.

*A2. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in local, state or national history;*

This criterion means that a property can be designated if it is associated with an individual who has made an important contribution to local, state, or national history. Examples include the founders of a community, an important writer or inventor, a political figure, or a community leader.

*A3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style or method of design or construction, or that represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;*

This is a complex criterion. The first part, concerning distinctive characteristics, means that a property can be designated if it is a good example of a particular architectural style, a kind of engineering, a kind of landscape architecture, or the informal ("vernacular") forms of construction used in King County during a particular period.

The second part, concerning a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, recognizes districts. A district may be significant as a whole even though it may be composed of elements - sites, buildings, structures and objects - that would not qualify individually. The identity of districts results from the grouping of their features and from their interrelationships. For example, a group of warehouses, which are not individually significant, may be important as a group because of their collective representation of an architectural style, their collective use of space, or their collective association with a community's industrial development.

*A4. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history;*

This criterion is usually applied to archaeological sites and districts, representing either historic or prehistoric time periods. It could also be applied to a building, structure, district, or object that could yield important information in architectural history, engineering history, or another field. Information may be important if it can bear on a particularly significant research question about the past, or if it is likely to be useful in addressing research questions that may be developed by archaeologists or others in the future.

*A5. Is an outstanding work of a designer or builder who has made a substantial contribution to the art.*

This allows the designation of properties designed or built by master architects, engineers, landscape architects, or builders. The individual responsible for the property does not necessarily have to be known by name; sometimes the work of a master builder or artisan can be recognized in the vernacular architecture of an area, or even in the prehistoric archaeological record, when the name or the individual has long been lost.

### **Criteria Considerations**

Criteria considerations are partial exceptions to, or limitations on, the eligibility of properties for landmark designation. In general, cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past forty years are not eligible for designation. Properties that have been moved from their original locations may be eligible if they are significant for architectural reasons, and if their new location is similar to the original in terms of neighboring building types, setbacks, etc.

*Criteria Consideration 1 provides that properties of the above listed types are not eligible for designation, unless they comprise an integral part of districts that meet Criterion A3 above.*

*Criteria Consideration 2 provides that a religious property is not eligible for landmark designation unless it derives primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance. Thus a church may not be designated unless it has architectural or artistic value, or is associated with historically important events or processes. The site of a religious rite cannot be designated unless the site, the rite, or both are associated with broader cultural patterns of historical significance.*

*Criteria Consideration 3 provides that a building or structure removed from its original location is not eligible for landmark designation unless it is significant primarily for its architectural or engineering value, or it is the surviving building or structure most directly associated with a historic person or event. This consideration recognizes that the original location of most historic properties contributes to their significance, so that their relocations may effectively sever them*

from their significant associations. A building significant for its architecture without reference to its surroundings may be eligible for landmark designation even if it has been moved, and, if there is no other building to represent a particular important event or person, then a relocated building may be designated.

*Criteria Consideration 4 provides that a birthplace or grave is not eligible for landmark designation, unless it is that of a historical figure of outstanding importance, and there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life. Thus the birthplace or grave of a community's founder is ordinarily not eligible. However, if there is no other place where the founder can be remembered, the birthplace or grave may be designated.*

*Criteria Consideration 5 provides that a cemetery is not eligible for landmark designation unless it derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events. A cemetery containing the remains of many historically important people may be designated, as may one whose tombstones or mortuary architecture are particularly distinctive, or one where significant historical events have occurred. Prehistoric and early historic cemeteries are usually eligible because of their age and their association with broad patterns of community development.*

*Criteria Consideration 6 provides that a reconstructed building is not eligible for landmark designation, except under certain exceptional circumstances. A reconstructed building can be designated if the reconstruction is historically accurate, if the building is accurately represented as part of a restoration master plan, and if no other original building or structure with the same association has survived. In other words, "stage set" reconstructions of historic places, such as "ghost towns" created out of whole cloth where no historic town ever existed cannot be designated, but reconstructed buildings or structures can be designated if they are the only properties representing a particular event, person, period, or type of construction.*

*Criteria Consideration 7 provides that properties that are primarily commemorative in intent cannot be designated, unless design, age, tradition, or symbolic value invests such properties with their own historical significance. Thus the statue of a town's founder cannot be designated unless it is an extremely good example of an artistic or architectural tradition, or is associated with traditions or events that give it its own significance, apart from that of the founder.*

*Criteria Consideration 8 forbids the designation of properties achieving significance within the past forty years unless such properties are of exceptional importance. Forty years is a general estimate of the period of time necessary for the development of the historical perspective necessary to evaluate significance. Properties associated with World War II and the early post-war period are now eligible for landmark designation, for example, and increasing attention is being given to properties associated with the post-war period.*

### **Integrity**

Besides meeting one or more of the designation criteria, a property must also have **integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association** in order to be eligible for landmark designation. This means, in effect, that if a property has been seriously compromised by unsympathetic alterations, it may not be eligible for designation.

Integrity must be judged with reference to the particular Criterion or Criteria under which a property is thought to be eligible. For example, if a property is eligible for the information it contains (Criterion A4), its "feeling" and "association" may be irrelevant, and it may not need to retain integrity in these areas. It must also be recognized that alterations to a property may themselves have historical or architectural significance, reflecting changing perceptions of style, changing construction techniques, or changing social and cultural processes.

### **Community Landmarks**

King County's landmark ordinance provides a way to recognize historic properties that do not retain sufficient physical integrity to be designated as landmarks but which otherwise meet one or more of the designation criteria, or historic properties which do not meet any of the designation criteria but are easily identifiable visual features of a neighborhood or the county, and contribute to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the county.