

Emily Gordon - Quick comment on historic districts (from someone who lives in one)

From: "David Shane" <me@davidshane.name>
To: <council@cityofeastlansing.com>
Date: 4/5/2019 6:48 PM
Subject: Quick comment on historic districts (from someone who lives in one)

Hello,

Just happened to catch this article this morning: <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/opinions-vary-value-east-lansings-historic-districts>, and thought you might care for my quick opinion, a someone who owns a home within the Chesterfield Hills neighborhood.

That opinion is - I would actually be OK with the complete elimination of the historic district designation. Our home was built in 1930, which is pretty typical for that neighborhood, and the truth is... a lot of these homes aren't particularly old or even particularly unique. I think the practical meaning of "historic district" in East Lansing is something like "decently nice homes that don't look like every home in a modern subdivision". Which is a fine thing to be but... eh.

And you think - what would really happen if the designation is eliminated? There are some homes in the neighborhood that are a little newer and frankly don't look especially great or historic - if an owner wanted to do major reconstruction on those homes to improve their appearance in a way that was "not historic", I would say amen to those changes and I have a feeling all their neighbors would as well. But the "historic district" designation could actually stand in the way of changes like that. (And incidentally, I always think it's weird that these rules require you to jump through hoops to make a change that is an improvement, but you can just let your property deteriorate with no special permission required.) And nobody will be taking a bulldozer to the homes that really are something special if the designation goes away.

And, of course, it would make things simpler for homeowners. We have personally had to get permission for one or two (can't quite remember) modifications to our home - we replaced the old, cracked basement windows with some block glass windows (which, actually, were not readily available for 1930-US home construction, but are completely unobjectionable), and we had some simple driveway work done that may have needed permission, I can't remember anymore. But the point is just - remove the "historic district" steps, and you save me and a contractor time, and also save the city time or money in processing, and hurt no one, at least in many (I suspect nearly all) proposed home modifications.

The "historic district" signs do make you feel a little special but... this is one homeowner saying he'd be fine with the designation going away.

David Shane