

# A Very Big Deal

We live in the smallest city in Michigan, one half square mile, and arguably one of the most beautiful. [Clarkston is a 19th century mill village](#). Many of our historic structures are still here from that era, intact and sitting where they were originally constructed.

[Since the 1980s Clarkston has been recognized on the National Register of Historic Places](#), *"the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources."*

It is interesting to me, Europe has always valued its history. In contrast, it seems, the United States has only discovered the value of protecting its historic properties as recently as 1966.

For us who live in Clarkston, being on the National Register of Historic Places is a very big deal. It puts us on the map. Our picturesque village is not just an isolated local town, but part of a huge movement across the nation to preserve America's historic treasures. The national register records a massive 1.5 million properties and 2,300 [historic districts](#) in the US. [Our district is more unique than many others](#), even more than "The Henry Ford" in Dearborn or Virginia's "Colonial Williamsburg". How so? Because we actually *live* in our 195 district homes. So ours is a living, intact and contiguous, historic mill village. That is a mouth full.

[All historic districts have ordinances requiring commissions and commissioners](#), and all have the same federal standards. This is not a Clarkston-only reality. All these resources are in place to help us preserve our original architecture.

Two classic examples are "Germantown" in Columbus Ohio where members of the German Village Society serve as caretakers (even replacing brick streets) dedicated to retaining character and distinction. The "Cottage Home District" in Indianapolis, "is both historically and architecturally significant to Indianapolis in Marion County."

In all historic districts applicants are required to obtain a "Certificate of Appropriateness"/"Authorization to Proceed" similar to a permit. This is not to make life hard for people, although that sometimes happens, but it is to preserve history and architectural detail. New construction or alterations of existing structures are not prohibited in historic neighborhoods, however construction or alteration is expected to be done in an historically appropriate manner. As an example, applicants are encouraged to direct any new construction to the rear of a structure not visible from a public street. Additional materials used for new construction should be compatible with existing historic materials".

If historic properties' original features are modified, they are no longer authentic. Even worse, once torn down you can't get them back. It's exciting for us to realize, we're among scores of places in our country successfully preserving architectural history. Please understand our [historic district commissioners](#) are trained volunteers, supported by a preservation architect, who realize homeowners have a valuable historic asset and enable them to keep it.

In future articles I want to talk about popular HGTV programs on historic preservation, research showing historic homes have higher property values, new state tax credits for restoring historic properties, the common sense behind federal standards, [how an historic district is like an HOA without the cost](#). I also want to discuss how technology is helping historic preservation and Clarkston is becoming a thought-leader nationally. If all this sounds interesting, stay tuned.

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