



HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE *to the* CITY of OREGON CITY'S  
Historic Properties







## *Welcome to the neighborhood*

Congratulations on your new home! You have made a great purchase, and we are so happy to welcome you to this beautiful, historical neighborhood. Oregon City is the first incorporated city west of the Rockies. Established in 1829 by Dr. John McLoughlin as a lumber mill near Willamette Falls, it was later designated as Oregon's territorial capital. Living near our many museums and historical buildings allows you a glimpse of pioneer life in Oregon territory. We hope this booklet of information helps you learn more about the benefits of living in a historical neighborhood, how to preserve your property, and who to contact with questions of any kind.

### *So I bought a house in a historical district... Now what?*

Below are some common questions and answers about owning a home here.

#### WHAT EFFECT WILL BEING IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT HAVE ON MY PROPERTY?

Historic district designation encourages maintenance of properties because the investment is better protected over a long period of time. Owners will know that the aspects that make a particular neighborhood attractive will be retained. Many believe that this means property values should stabilize or improve.

#### WHO ADMINISTERS OREGON CITY PRESERVATION ORDINANCE AND HOW DIFFICULT IS THE REVIEW PROCESS?

Oregon City's Historic Preservation Ordinance is administered by the Oregon City Planning Department. Minor alterations may require only Department staff review. More significant alterations are reviewed by the Historic Review Board, a volunteer board appointed by the City Commission. A workable solution to the applicant's needs can usually be found and approved. The Planning Department staff and the Historic Review Board work with the applicant to find a good solution that meets the applicant's needs and the Ordinance standards.

#### WILL I BE FORCED TO RESTORE MY BUILDING?

No, you will not be forced to improve your building. However, new alterations require review by either staff or the Historic Review Board.

#### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "MAINTENANCE" AND "CHANGES"?

Ordinary maintenance and minor repairs involving identical materials and design do not require an application. Painting previously painted surfaces is a common example of what does not need approval. However, repairs that will use different materials, that would change the existing character of the building, or which are extensive enough to require a building permit, must be ap-



proved before work begins. If there is any doubt, owners should consult with the Historic Preservation staff by phone or in person.

#### ARE THERE ALTERATIONS THAT WILL NOT BE APPROVED?

Alterations which are typically denied are:

- Installing vinyl or aluminum siding over wood or other historic materials
- Installing vinyl or aluminum windows
- Painting a masonry surface which is not currently painted
- Sandblasting pressure grit washing, or high pressure water washing
- Removing or changing distinctive architectural details.
- Use of pressure treated wood as a finish material



## WILL BEING IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT RAISE MY TAXES?

No. Re-assessment occurs periodically on a city-wide basis. Inclusion of a building in a historic district will not trigger re-assessment nor cause it to be singled out for additional taxes.

## DOES THE ORDINANCE RESTRICT WHAT I CAN DO WITH THE INTERIOR OF MY PROPERTY?

No. Oregon City's Historic Preservation Ordinance does not allow review of any interior alterations. It only applies to changes in the exterior appearance of the building.

## DOES THE ORDINANCE CONTROL WHAT COLOR I MAY PAINT MY HOUSE?

No. You may paint previously painted surfaces any color you wish. However, if you wish, the City Planning Department staff will offer assistance in the selection of historically appropriate paint colors.

## WILL THIS RESTRICT HOW I CAN USE MY BUILDING?

No. Oregon City's Historic Preservation Ordinance does not review or restrict use. Your underlying zoning designation controls the uses allowed on your property.

## DOES MY BUILDING HAVE TO LOOK EXACTLY THE SAME AFTER I'VE MADE THE CHANGES I NEED?

Your building does not have to look exactly the same after you have made alterations, as long as the changes have been approved. If your building will look exactly the same after you have done your work, the project does not require review. The work would be considered maintenance. If there will be a visible building alteration involving one of the reviewable



activities it should receive approval before proceeding.

## WON'T IT BE MORE EXPENSIVE FOR ME TO REPAIR OR REMODEL MY PROPERTY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ORDINANCE?

Not necessarily. There are many different materials and methods that may be used for most preservation projects. The Standards in the Oregon City's Historic Preservation Ordinance include language that allows flexibility in approach, such as "wherever possible" and "when feasible". Repair is preferable over replacement and is often less expensive.

## MY PROPERTY IS NOT VERY OLD, WHY IS IT CONSIDERED HISTORIC?

A property may be considered historic if it is at least 50 years old and retains its distinguishing architectural character and design intent. A historic building need not be a pristine example of its architectural style, but should retain a significant portion of its character-defining elements. Character-defining elements include the overall shape of the building, its materials, craftsmanship, decorative details, interior spaces and features, as well as the various aspects of its site and environment. In addition, some "noncontributing" properties that are not considered historic are included in historic districts because they are mixed in with properties that are historic. In the Canemah National Register District, all homes are designated, regardless of their age.



## *Historic Preservation Grant*

As a historic property owner, you have been given the opportunity to help preserve a part of Oregon's history. Until now, historic owners have had little support in maintaining or repairing their buildings. The Historic Review Board and the City of Oregon City recognize that with local historic designation should come some amount of assistance. The Historic Review Board's preservation grant program makes funds available to property owners of locally designated historic buildings desiring to make exterior rehabilitation or renovation improvements. Structural improvements to preserve the integrity of the structure may also qualify. The conditions of this program require that all projects be in keeping with the architectural integrity of the structure.

Applicants are limited to \$3,000 of grant funds every two years. A 50% match is required, and each grant award is limited to \$1,000 dollars. The Historic Review Board may choose to grant additional funds at the end of the fiscal year if there is money remaining in the grant budget.

### WHAT DOES THE GRANT PAY FOR?

- Window Repair
- Wood Storm Windows
- Replacement of Missing Elements
- Porch/Roof/Foundation Repair

## *Demolition Denial and Demolition by Neglect*

Oregon City adopted demolition denial and demolition by neglect code in 2008. They can be found in Oregon City Municipal code section 15.25 Demolition by Neglect and 17.40 Historic Overlay District.

### DEMOLITION DENIAL

Many cities across the nation and in Oregon are recognizing the link between the protection of historic resources and their economic vitality. These cities are adopting regulations allowing for denial of the demolition of historic structures in certain instances. The threat of demolition denial can be as successful as the actual denial when attempting to preserve the City's historic resources. A potential purchaser with the singular desire to demolish and replace the existing structure without consideration to its historic importance may not commit to the purchase if the potential for denial is possible. This allows for the redevelopment of the property in accordance with the City's desire to preserve its historical structures, while building for the future. In our growing city, the pressure to tear down historic properties rather than preserve them is very palpable. Oregon City is just beginning to experience this pressure. Demolition denial also plays a role in maintaining an affordable housing stock.

### DEMOLITION BY NEGLECT

If a city can delay or deny the demolition of a historic structure, a property owner may allow a building to become an eyesore and fall into a state of disrepair. This is why the second tool- demolition by neglect- is needed to ensure the City's historic resources are preserved. "Demolition by Neglect" is the term used to describe a situation in which a property owner intentionally allows a historic property to suffer severe deterioration, potentially beyond the point of repair. Property owners have been known to use this kind of long-term neglect to circumvent historic preservation regulations.

Demolition by neglect codes allows a city to direct a property owner to maintain their historic buildings and require certain repairs if the city finds the building could be compromised if the repairs are not completed. Many ordinances allow for the city to make the repairs and lien the property, if necessary, to recover the cost of the project. The power of demolition by neglect does not come from the actual implementation of the ordinance, instead it comes from the threat of using it. If a property owner knows the city can lien the property they will often choose to perform the work themselves at a lower cost.

## *Owning historic property in Oregon City*

### WHAT ARE OREGON CITY'S HISTORIC DISTRICTS?

Oregon City has two local historic districts: the McLoughlin Conservation District and the Canemah National Register District. While one of these districts is on the National Register, both are regulated on the local level. Also regulated are approximately 60 Landmarks located outside of either district.

#### McLOUGHLIN CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Many of Oregon City's historic and architecturally significant buildings are above the bluff in the McLoughlin neighborhood. The original Oregon City plat includes the neighborhood area up to Van Buren Street, and it is within this area that early residential development took place, beginning in the 1850s. As the Downtown area changed from a residential to commercial district, home building increased above the bluff. All of the churches that originally stood in the Downtown eventually relocated to the McLoughlin area as well.

#### CANEMAH NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICT

Canemah is an important example of a relatively intact riverboat town with architectural resources dating from the 1860s. Having evolved from a community for the elite of the riverboat industry to a workers' community, Canemah retains essentially the same sense of place it had in the latter half of the 19th century. Situated above the Falls of the Willamette, it was an important portage town and the major shipbuilding center on the upper Willamette River.



## McLOUGHLIN DISTRICT



*In 1917, this lot was sold to Hugh S. and Matilda Mount. Hugh Mount, M.D., F.A.C.S., was an Oregon City financier and surgeon who had a joint practice with his brothers Guy and Albert, also physicians, and Clyde who was a dentist. Later a nephew, Frank and J.C. Cleland joined the team, and in 1912 the consortium took over the Oregon City Hospital, which they operated through the 1920s. Hugh was a prominent member of the community, He and his wife sold the home in 1931.*



### WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS?

Local historic districts are created to protect historic areas or groups of historic structures against loss of historic fabric and features and to prevent insensitive changes. The properties within a historic district are a source of community pride. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has found that local historic districts provide the following benefits to their communities:

- Local districts protect the investment of owners and residents of historic properties
- Local districts encourage better quality design
- Local districts help the environment by contributing to the revitalization of neighborhoods and conserving the resources they contain
- Historic districts provide a tangible link to the past, a way to bring meaning to history and people's lives
- A local district can result in a positive economic impact from tourism
- Local districts enhance business recruitment potential
- Local districts provide social and psychological benefits.

**THE McLOUGHLIN DISTRICT** is referred to as the “second level,” reflecting its topography and relationship to the original town of Oregon City, which lies just below at the base of a steep basalt cliff. In the 1850's few people built homes on the second level but as the downtown area became more crowded, and after completion of the Oregon & California railroad in late 1869, more residents moved up the hill, to what is now called the McLoughlin neighborhood. Construction continued from the 1870's into the first quarter of the 1900's, it is primarily the buildings from this period which contribute to McLoughlin's late 19th - early 20th century ambience. Along with residential homes, churches

and schools were also established in the McLoughlin Neighborhood, many of which still stand today.

Beginning in 1982 the McLoughlin neighborhood sought designation as an Oregon City Historic Conservation District, which was achieved in 1986. Following a survey of 971 buildings, 305 were identified as architecturally or historically significant properties. In 2002 a resurvey noted approximately 200 more buildings within the district boundaries of lesser significance, but due to their age and form were seen as strengthening the overall historic character of the district. The resurvey found the district eligible for listing as an historic district on National Register of Historic Places. At the same time, historic structures beyond the Conservation District boundaries but within the city limits of Oregon City were surveyed and 72 were designated of historic significance. Some of these are close to the McLoughlin district; others are farther from the core area, either isolated in newer subdivisions or still within their larger homestead-era properties. It should be noted that some of the oldest homes have been moved into the district for their preservation, including the Barclay, McLoughlin, and Ermatinger preterritorial homes. Since the 1970's individual properties have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places (nearly all are also city landmarks), and several have been restored.



## Canemah National Register District

*Canemah is an important example of a relatively intact riverboat town with architectural resources dating from the 1860s. Having evolved from a community for the elite of the riverboat industry to a workers' community, Canemah retains essentially the same sense of place it had in the latter half of the 19th century. Situated above the Falls of the Willamette, it was an important portage town and the major shipbuilding center on the upper Willamette River.*

### CANEMAH DISTRICT

E.B. FELLOWS HOUSE 416 S McLoughlin Blvd

Interest in the history of the McLoughlin Neighborhood developed in the 1980's through walking tours organized by an individual, as well as by members of the Old House Forum, a group of historic home owners. In the mid-1980's concern about preserving historic buildings mounted during the city's comprehensive plan update. Residents feared that proposed rezoning to high density residential would lead to destruction of its older buildings. In 2004 Oregon City's updated Comprehensive Plan recommended that the McLoughlin Conservation District be changed to a National Register Historic District, like Canemah.

There are approximately 153 blocks in the McLoughlin Conservation District of which 121 are from the original plat of Oregon City. They are approximately 200 x 200 feet square, and generally divided into 50x100 foot lots. The exception to the square conformance are the blocks between Center and Van Buren, 10th and 11th streets where they are slightly narrower. Many of the blocks were further divided by alleys. Some of these alleys have been vacated and built upon; others, especially in the two blocks which parallel the main business thoroughfare on 7th Street, continue to be used as alleys.

**THE CANEMAH HISTORIC DISTRICT** is located at the southwesterly edge of the city limits of Oregon City, on the southerly (rocky ledged) bank of the Willamette River, just above the Falls. The community lies within a crescent-shaped hollow in the basalt cliffs that rise to the south above the river. Its name is said to derive from a Native American

word "kanim" for "canoe place" and it was the existence of a graveled beach that gave rise to the town's establishment in 1845. Because of the falls, cargo and passengers had to be portaged at this point.

This location allowed the founding of the town for the purpose as a river boat building and trade destination during the 1850's through 1870's. Canemah is significant to the state as one of only a few remaining intact former riverboat towns. Canemah was annexed to Oregon City in 1928, although it has remained separate in many ways since. Canemah is generally bounded by the Willamette River the north, on the east by the hillside that descends steeply to the river, on the south by the upper bluffs. The western boundary is less confined by topography than by the original land claim. The district is comprised of several large lots and 41 blocks; 37 blocks from the original 1850 plat and 4 from the 1891 First Addition to Canemah with a total area of approximately 63.71 acres.





## HELPFUL RESOURCES

### THE PLANNING DIVISION

PHONE: 503-722-3789

*The Oregon City Planning Division is responsible for all long range and current planning as well as the implementation of the Oregon City Comprehensive Plan and associated Municipal Ordinances. Visit the website for more information:*  
[www.orcity.org/planning/resourcespublications](http://www.orcity.org/planning/resourcespublications)

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION STAFF

[ocplanning@orcity.org](mailto:ocplanning@orcity.org)

### OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPT

*State Historic Preservation Office*

*725 Summer St NE, Suite C*

*Salem OR 97301*

[www.oregon.gov/OPRD/OH](http://www.oregon.gov/OPRD/OH)

National Park Service Historic Preservation Page -  
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/index.htm>



Oregon City Founder:  
Dr. John McLoughlin

This publication has been funded with the assistance of a matching grant-in-aid from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the Historic Preservation Fund, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. Any opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of Federal assistance should write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1201 Eye Street, NW (2740) Washington, DC 20005

The activity that is the subject of this brochure has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior.



# HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE to the CITY of OREGON CITY'S Historic Properties

Mailing address

## Doing work on your property? Check the HRB Policies before you start!

See full list of HRB Policies here: [www.oregoncity.org/planning/hrb-policies](http://www.oregoncity.org/planning/hrb-policies)

Projects that meet the Historic Review Board (HRB) policies have been pre-approved by the HRB and do not have to request approval through the historic review process.

Not sure if your project meets the Policies? Email planning staff - [ocplanning@oregoncity.org](mailto:ocplanning@oregoncity.org) - with your question.

Historic guidelines do not apply to interior work, regular maintenance or repair of existing structures.

### The 13 current HRB Policies include:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| #1 - Construction and Repair of <b>Foundations</b> | #8 - <b>Exterior Alterations</b> to Buildings in National |
| #2 - <b>Storm Windows</b> and Doors                | Historic Districts, or Structures in                      |
| #3 - Repair or Replacement of <b>Siding</b>        | Conservation Districts or Landmark Structures             |
| #4 - <b>Gutters</b> and Downspouts                 | #9 - <b>Screen Doors</b>                                  |
| #5 - <b>Roofs</b>                                  | #10 - <b>Window</b> Repair and Replacement                |
| #6 - <b>Fences and Walls</b>                       | #11 - <b>Porches and Decks</b>                            |
| #7 - Construction of <b>Accessory Structures</b>   | #12 - <b>Solar</b> Technology                             |
|  | #13 - Public Art <b>Murals</b>                            |

[www.oregoncity.org/planning/hrb-policies](http://www.oregoncity.org/planning/hrb-policies)