

# Just Askin': What is a historic zoning overlay and where are they in Nashville?



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- There are six different types of historic overlays.
- Historic overlays are a way of preserving historic buildings, sites and districts.
- Historic overlays must be requested by residents of a neighborhood or district.

Anyone who has driven around Nashville in the last decade has probably seen one.

Maybe you didn't know it by name, but the ever-present "tall and skinny" is becoming a Nashville staple, whether we like it or not. And no, we're not talking about the lanky dude wearing faded Wranglers picking his guitar on Broadway.

We're talking about the taller and skinnier homes being built on a lot to accommodate multiple houses wedged onto one lot.

**Question:** Older houses are being torn down and replaced by so-called tall skinnies all over Nashville, changing the appearance of older neighborhoods. I live in Hillsboro/Belmont, which is protected by a conservation overlay. How many conservation and historic overlays are there in Nashville? Where are they located?

**Answer:** There are six different types of historic overlays that protect some 30-plus areas spread across Davidson County (see the full list below). According to Metro Historic Zoning Commission administrator Robin Zeigler, a historic zoning overlay is the only tool to potentially prevent the demolition of historic properties. What it can't do is protect a property that's not protected by a historic overlay.

## **A deeper dive into historic overlays**

Historic overlays are a way of preserving historic buildings, sites, and districts through a design review process using design guidelines based on national standards and customized for Nashville's historic context.

Historic zoning overlays are locally designated and administered by the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission, an agency of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, according to the historic zoning website.

It goes on to say that historic zoning overlays are applied in addition to the base or land-use zoning of an area. Historic zoning overlays do not regulate use but rather focus on architectural design. Like the National Register of Historic Places, historic preservation zoning honors an area's historical significance.



Nashville has six different types of historic overlays, Zeigler told The Tennessean. There are Historic Landmarks, Historic Landmark-Interior, Historic-Landmark-Signage, and Historic B&Bs, which are typically one site or one campus of related buildings.

"Historic Preservation and Neighborhood Conservation zoning overlays are districts," Zeigler said in an email to The Tennessean. "The two differ in terms of what is reviewed. In both, new construction, demolition in whole or in part, and moving a building in or out of the district is reviewed. In Historic Preservation zoning overlays, all exterior alterations are also reviewed. Our Historic Preservation zoning overlays is the more traditional tool and the one used by many municipalities across the country."

## **What is the purpose of a historic zoning overlay?**

According to the Historic Zoning Commission, historic zoning helps stabilize property values, gives residents greater control over development in their neighborhoods, promotes heritage tourism, and preserves natural resources

by conserving building materials. It also protects the past for future generations, nurtures a sense of community, and contributes to a sense of place.



## How do I know if my house is in a historic overlay?

The Metro Historic Zoning Commission has an online tool available to anyone wanting to see what types of zoning apply to their property. The districts can be seen by turning on layers in [Metro's Parcel Viewer](#). There are maps within each set of design guidelines.

Zeigler said that neighborhoods that are protected by historic zoning overlays are in existence because property owners requested it. It doesn't happen automatically. So if you think your neighborhood needs historic zoning protection, it's worth asking if your neighborhood qualifies for it.



## How do I stay informed?

The Historic Zoning Commission encourages residents to get involved in a number of ways, including:

1. Sign up to receive emails when a meeting agenda is posted [here](#).
2. Stay abreast of applications, staff recommendations and permits [here](#).
3. Review staff reports with proposed plans [here](#).
4. Appoint a historic zoning liaison in your neighborhood to check agendas each month and relay information to the neighborhood.
5. Additional information on historic zoning and the permitting process can be found in the [Metro Historic Zoning Handbook](#).