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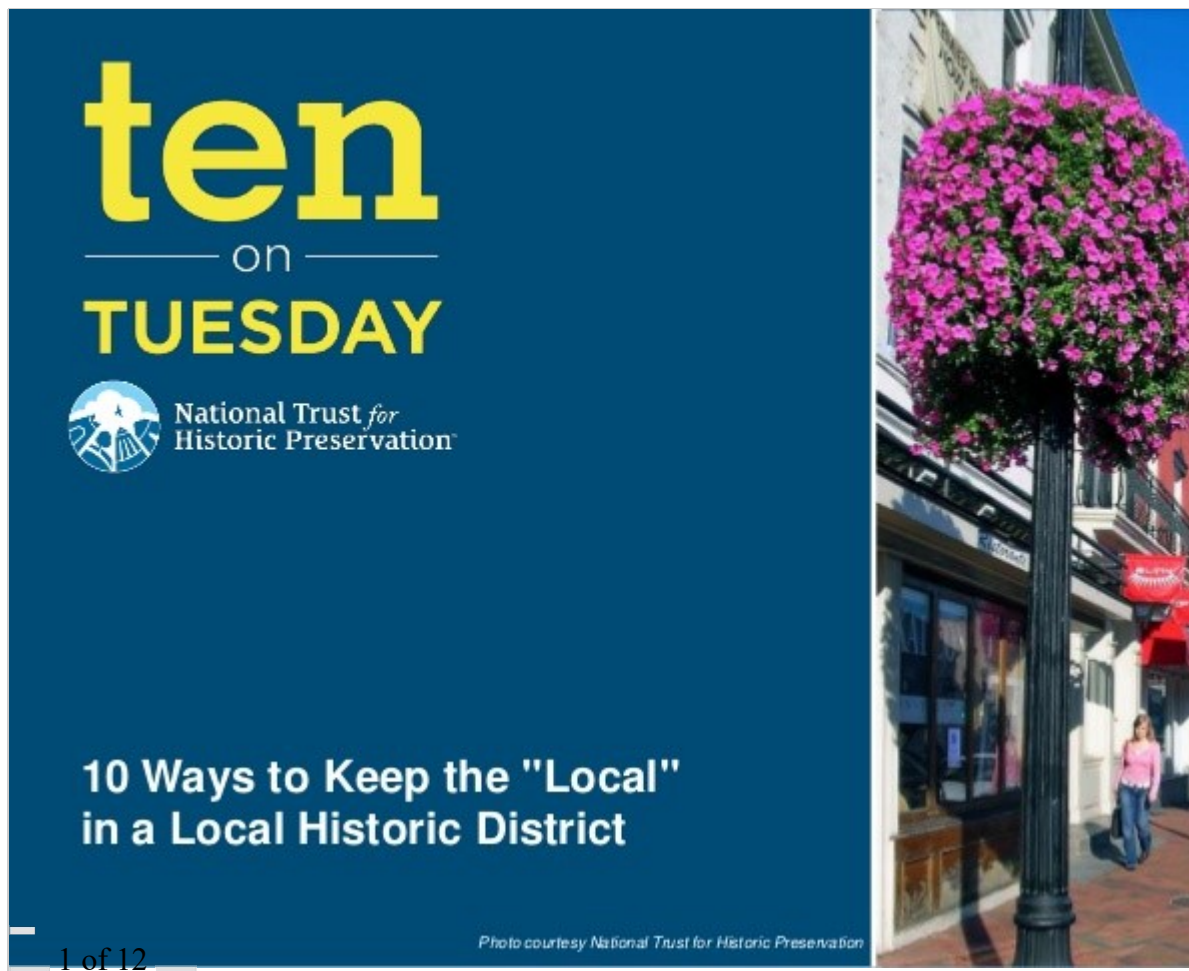
# 10 Ways to Keep the "Local" in a Local Historic District

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**[10 on Tuesday] 10 Ways to Keep the "Local" in a Local Historic District** from **Saving Places**

Over the past several weeks we've covered several aspects of creating local historic districts, including [deciding to establish a local historic district](#) [Link: /10-steps-to-establish-a-local-historic-district] , [considering where its boundaries should be](#) [Link: /10-on-tuesday-10-factors-in-establishing-local-historic-district-boundary-lines/] , and [getting community buy-in](#) [Link: /10-on-tuesday-10-benefits-of-establishing-a-local-historic-district/#.UQafHr\_BEew] . This week, we're looking at keeping the local in your historic district, because districts are not a one-size-fits-all solution.

**1. Think beyond your buildings.** The most successful historic districts take the streetscape and surrounding landscape into account. [Aiken, South Carolina, for example](#) [Link: <http://www.cityofaikensc.gov/index.php/government/departments/planning/planning-department/historical-preservation/>] , uses its historic district to

not only manage the built environment, but also to maintain the community's pastoral quality -- with even certain trees designated as landmarks.

**2. Consider your local zoning regulations.** Historic districts work best when they are hand-in-hand with supportive land use and zoning laws. To achieve this balance -- and avoid an incompatible big-box store in your historic downtown -- it may be necessary to amend local zoning.

**3. Look for signs.** That is, consider the signage in and adjacent to your proposed historic district. Is it of appropriate size and design for the area? And more importantly, are there any unusual "signs" -- like murals or neon -- that might not fit current design guidelines but should be protected as part of the character of the neighborhood?

**4. Make your community greener.** When crafting historic district guidelines, keep in mind conservation measures (awnings, windows, insulation) and energy generation (wind and solar). Don't focus on current technologies -- they will change -- but rather on broad sustainability principles and on creating positive outcomes for both property owners and the environment.

**5. Keep an eye on local government.** Government land and buildings can often fall within the boundaries of a local historic district, but sometimes the final ordinances exempt them from historic district regulations. If you're starting from scratch, it's worth thinking about -- and codifying -- how your local government's actions will be reviewed.

**6. Go inside.** While most historic districts focus on the exterior of buildings, some communities -- including Boston, Seattle, New York City, and Asheville, NC -- also include some regulation of interiors for significant public spaces, like hotel lobbies or banks. Does your community have any "signature" spaces? If so, consider including them.

**7. Plan ahead for resistance, part one.** Even if you have done an excellent job [getting buy-in](#) [Link: /10-on-tuesday-10-benefits-of-establishing-a-local-historic-district/#.UQafHr\_BEew] , there will likely be a handful of people who object to their property being in a historic district -- some of whom could be willing to demolish or alter their building to get out of it. A technique to combat this is to put a moratorium on permits in

areas where historic designation has been initiated, but not yet approved.

Tip: Be sure to comply with all relevant laws and follow proper procedures if you go down this path. Failure to do so could violate property owners' rights to due process under the law.

**8. Plan ahead for resistance, part two.** On occasion, property owners will show their displeasure with a historic district by allowing their building to fall into disrepair to the point where it becomes a safety hazard and needs to be demolished. This is referred to as "demolition by neglect" and can be managed in your historic district guidelines with a minimum maintenance requirement. [A good example](http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/law-and-policy/legal-resources/understanding-preservation-law/resources/Demolition-By-Neglect.pdf) [Link: <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/law-and-policy/legal-resources/understanding-preservation-law/resources/Demolition-By-Neglect.pdf>] is the city of San Francisco, which has explicit language around this requirement.

**9. Take an alternative approach.** Community-generated "conservation districts" -- areas which have less-stringent regulations than a traditional historic district and are accompanied with tax incentives and other inducements -- are growing in popularity and may be a better fit for your historic areas.

**10. Don't overburden your historic district commissioners.** Creating a district involves a great deal of effort and requires broad collaboration within the community. But the skills that creating a district requires are not necessarily the same as maintaining the district, getting funding, etc. Be sure to continue working with the local government, nonprofits, and other organizations once the district is established.

Sarah Heffern is the National Trust's director of social media. While she embraces all things online and pixel-centric, she's also a hard-core building hugger, having first fallen for historic places in a fifth grade "Built Environment" class.



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