

AGENDA

AMBLER BOROUGH PLANNING COMMISSION

I. CALL TO ORDER

October 26, 2021 (7:00 PM)

II. ROLL CALL

III. APPROVAL OF: September 28, 2021 Minutes

IV. OLD BUSINESS:

1. Input requested to explore ways to preserve Ambler's historic resources.

2. Input requested to create a conceptual plan incorporating identified community needs and improvements for each park in the Borough to be used as part of a larger Master Park Plan.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Below are the three key questions the Commission will be discussing for the next steps.

1. What are you trying to achieve?

- Maintain scale and character of existing buildings
- Guide compatible infill and new construction
- Preserve distinctive features or materials
- Acknowledge important places, groups, and stories
- Encourage sensitive adaption
- Encourage revitalization
- Prevent or discourage demolition

2. What types of changes are your trying to manage?

- Demolition
- New Construction
- Major Alterations
- Features and Materials
- Setting and Landscape

3. What scale are you hoping to impact?

- Individual buildings
- Neighborhoods and corridors
- Both?

What is a Historic District?

A historic district is typically a collection of historic resources (such as buildings, sites, structures, and objects) within a defined boundary that are collectively significant at the local, state, or national level for its historical associations or architectural merit. Typically, the historic resources within a historic district are 50 years old or older and retain integrity, which generally means that the resource has not changed significantly over time.

For example, a historic district may include commercial, residential, industrial, and institutional buildings that have been built over time and reflect a community's development. A historic district may also include only one part of a community, such as a residential neighborhood, that is a good example of historic architectural styles.

What is a Local Historic District?

A local historic district is one designated by municipal ordinance under the Historic District Act (also known as an Act 167 district) or the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) within the municipality's geographic boundaries.

What is a National Register Historic District?

A National Register historic district is one listed in the National Register of Historic Places under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

What are the differences between a local and National Register historic district?**Local Historic Districts:**

- Protect a municipality's historic properties from demolition and inappropriate construction or alteration through a local design review process
- Designate properties and district boundaries based on local criteria and procedures
- Offer no financial assistance or tax incentives unless such are provided by local ordinance
- Require a local board or commission to review and act on all work proposed in the district based on local design guidelines and/or standards
- Allow private owners to use their property within the restrictions of the local zoning ordinance

National Register Historic Districts:

- Intended to protect properties in the district during the planning process for projects involving federal funding, licenses or permits
- Criteria for evaluating eligibility and defining district boundaries are established at the federal level by the National Park Service
- Makes income-producing properties eligible for the federal historic tax credit Program
- Requires owners to meet the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards* when rehabilitating their property with the assistance of federal funding or tax credits
- Does not restrict a private property owner's use of their property if no federal funding is involved, nor does it obligate owners to preserve or restore their property for the benefit of the public

What is the Historic District Act?

The Historic District Act (AUTHORIZING POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS TO CREATE HISTORIC DISTRICT Act of Jun. 13, 1961, P.L. 282, No. 167, Cl. 53), known as Act 167, authorizes political subdivisions to create historic districts within their geographic boundaries, to appoint Board(s) of Historical Architectural Review, to empower the protection of the character of local historic districts, and regulate the built environment within its boundaries.

What is the Municipalities Planning Code?

The Municipalities Planning Code (Act of 1968, P.L.805, No.247), known as the MPC, empowers counties and municipalities, individually or jointly, to plan their development and to govern the same by zoning, subdivision and land development ordinances and additional tools.

What is the difference between local historic districts created by the Historic District Act and the MPC?**Historic District Act (Act 167):**

- Authorizes municipalities to review work on buildings or properties in the historic district, such as:
 - Demolition
 - New construction
 - Repairs, alterations, additions
 - Signs
- Regulates within one or more defined historic districts
- Historic district must be certified by PHMC as "historical"
- A Board of Historical Architectural Review (often referred to as the Historical Architectural Review Board or HARB) is appointed by the governing body
- Governing body approves issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness
- Zoning or Codes Enforcement Officer issues the appropriate permit (building, demolition or sign)

Municipalities Planning Code (MPC):

- Authorizes municipalities to review changes to historic buildings and properties in historic districts, including their setting and landscape
- Municipality can also provide zoning incentives to encourage preservation and discourage demolition or inappropriate changes
- May establish a zoning overlay to regulate dispersed historic resources as well as historic districts
- **Historic Landmark Properties**
- Some municipalities establish a Historical Commission to review applications for changes on designated properties covered by the ordinance

For more information on community planning, please visit the PHMC website at
www.phmc.pa.gov/preservation/community-preservation

NOTE: This document provides a general summary of these programs and laws as they are most commonly applied in PA; individual municipalities may implement preservation programs in various forms and combinations, including the use of different terminology.

Historic Preservation, Open Space, Parks, and Sustainability

Historic Preservation

With a history going as far back as the late 1700s, Ambler Borough is not without its fair amount of historically significant resources. Ambler's community has identified the borough's historic resources worthy of preservation within Ambler's 1999 Historic Resource Comprehensive Survey and 2006 Open Space Plan. Besides the sites certified by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission as Eligible for the National Register, Ambler has listed approximately 912 historic resources that contribute to the strong cultural and architectural value contained within the borough. Now that this comprehensive listing is complete, Ambler is investigating various approaches on how to permanently protect these resources. Some of these significant historic sites in the borough are located on Figure 1 and include:



Ambler Borough Hall

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| 1. Mary Ambler Homestead (1928) | 12. Deck's Hardware Store (1880) |
| 2. Former Forest Avenue School | 13. Jonathan Lukens Home (1840-1850) |
| 3. Whitcomb House (1840-1850) | 14. Korean Presbyterian Church (1894) |
| 4. Ambler Post Office/Borough Hall (1939) | 15. Henry Keasbey House (1882) |
| 5. Ambler Theater (1928) | 16. Ambler Trust Company (1917) |
| 6. Keasbey & Mattison Boiler Plant | 17. Bell Telephone Exchange/Old Borough Hall (1906) |
| 7. Former Ambler Southbound Railroad Station (1888) | 18. First National Bank of Ambler (1923) |
| 8. Keasbey & Mattison Co. Garage (1875-1880) | 19. Reiff's Mill (1731-47) |
| 9. Evan Ambler House and Store (1840-1850) | 20. Northbound Ambler Railroad Station (1888) |
| 10. Sunnyside Academy/Joseph Wilson's Store (1826) | 21. Lewis Ambler House (1844) |
| 11. Wyndham Hotel (1893) | 22. Joseph Haywood House |

As first established in the 2006 Open Space Plan, the borough recommends the following objectives for preserving and enhancing its historic resources:

- Use historic markers to identify historic sites and tell their stories
- Establish a fund for the restoration of historic building facades.
- Promote heritage tourism in Ambler through the use of maps, literature, and trail connections.

Open Space

Ambler is a traditional town that has developed to the point of being considered built-out. This level of development density has placed the little remaining undeveloped land at a premium. Similar to the emphasis placed in preserving its unique built environment, the borough has taken great steps in protecting what remains of Ambler's natural environment. A primary purpose of the borough's efforts to protect its natural features is to reduce hazardous flooding. Because Ambler borders the Wissahickon Creek and is situated downstream from other largely developed communities, the situation has resulted in severe flooding during extreme rainfalls.

Several goals and objectives within Ambler's 2006 Open Space Plan concern how to protect sensitive natural features and reduce flooding. Since 2006, many measures have already been taken through the enforcement of land development ordinances that reduce impervious coverage, mitigate stormwater runoff, and establish setbacks from environmentally sensitive areas.

Figure 1: Historic Preservation, Open Space and Parks

