

PREPARING AN APPLICATION FOR A DETERMINATION OF STATEWIDE SIGNIFICANCE

In 1989 the General Assembly amended North Carolina General Statute 160A-400.14 to authorize local preservation commissions to delay indefinitely the demolition of a locally designated historic landmark of statewide significance or of a property of statewide significance in a locally designated historic district. Determinations of whether a property is of statewide significance are made by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

For properties individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places at a statewide or national level of significance, the determination process is usually straightforward. Often, however, the property for which a determination of statewide significance is sought is not individually listed in the National Register. In this case, the applicant is required to document the property's statewide significance. Because this is no small task, in addition to the "Authority, Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures for Determining 'Statewide Significance' of Historic Properties Under G.S. 160A-400.14(c)" that is available from this office, we offer a few specific tips based on recent experience with determinations of statewide significance:

First, successful applications need to go above and beyond a local designation report in order to present a property as significant in a statewide context. Applicants need to be particularly concerned with developing context and comparing the property to others in the state. Applicants should devote special attention to the sections of the guidelines that explain what context and comparison entail.

Second, an application must be complete. A complete application is comprised of:

- * A statement of the statewide significance of the property.
- * Identification of a property's context.
- * A general statement of the evolution, distribution, character and condition of other properties within that context across the state.
- * A comparison of the property to others that share its context.

You may wish to contact this office as you consider how you will portray the property from a statewide perspective. We offer the following resources for your use:

- * A computer search for National Register properties of, for example, the same type or by the same architect.
- * Files of properties that have been identified in a local survey. These files usually include a photo and a brief description of the property. These records may only be used on-site in our Raleigh office.
- * Publications resulting from local surveys.
- * References to experts who may offer their opinions.
- * Our staff's knowledge of comparable properties in the state.

Please contact us, and we will make arrangements for you to use the above resources and any others appropriate to your case.

We are happy to assist you as you prepare the application. However, once the application has been submitted, we will evaluate it as we receive it. If the application is not complete, we will notify the applicant. The applicant may choose to complete the application or may direct us to evaluate the property based on the information we have. As the guidelines direct, we may be unable to make a determination of statewide significance if we do not have sufficient information.

We will evaluate a property using the minimum requirements for statewide significance listed in the guidelines. Briefly, the property must:

- * Retain a high degree of integrity.
- * Be demonstrated to be of statewide importance based on a comparative evaluation of other properties that share its historic theme or context.
- * Contribute to the understanding and appreciation of its statewide context:
 - It must have highly important associations significant to North Carolina.
 - It must be a prototype or a notable or best surviving work.
 - It must have demonstrated archaeological potential.

BEYOND TODAY'S APPLICATION

Statewide significance is a distinction attainable by a relatively small number of properties in North Carolina. The process by which a property is determined to be of statewide significance is marked by high standards and solid research and analysis. Usually, the process is triggered by a threat of demolition which requires quick action.

Therefore, we strongly suggest that in addition to familiarizing yourself with the application process for a determination of statewide significance, your commission may also wish to identify now the properties that are its most important and decide if they are potentially of statewide significance.

Consider a phased plan of individual nominations to the National Register of Historic Places at the statewide level of significance for these properties if they are not already listed. In this way, you will have done much of the groundwork and decision-making before a crisis; you will have property owners who are aware of the status of their property and of their rights and responsibilities; and you will have recognized and honored deserving properties.

Also, because a determination of statewide significance is difficult to obtain and a demolition delay entails political and legal risk for a commission, when you know a building is threatened with demolition and you decide to seek a determination of statewide significance, also devote just as many if not more resources to exploring other, non-regulatory alternatives to demolition. Do not wait for the State Historic Preservation Officer's determination of statewide significance.

For more information call 919/807-6574 or write:

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