



# Leesburg

## I. INTRODUCTION



## A. Overview of Historic Zoning

The Town of Leesburg began as a crossroads settlement at the intersection of two colonial trading routes. In time it grew from a village of 60 acres to its present 12 square miles. More than 250 years later, the town reflects that early history through its preservation of a wealth of historic structures.

The Old and Historic District (OHD), listed on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places, was originally focused on the 1758 Nicolas Minor Plan and the 1878 Gray's New Map of Leesburg.

The present district has been expanded to include the later development that surrounds this historic core and now encompasses over 177 acres. Among the earliest preservation efforts in Virginia, a local historic district was created over 40 years ago.

Adopted in 1963, the H-1 Overlay District sought to protect the integrity of the OHD from the negative effects of the post-war building boom on suburban northern Virginia. By creating the historic district, the Town Council acted to prevent demolition and insensitive rehabilitation of existing structures as well as the construction of inappropriately designed new buildings.

By implementing an historic zoning program, Leesburg joined many other communities nationwide that had previously adopted similar ordinances. Such efforts go back to 1931, when Charleston's historic zoning program was established.

After Virginia enacted enabling legislation permitting governing bodies to create such ordinances, Richmond, Charlottesville, Alexandria, and Williamsburg all implemented historic zoning programs before Leesburg embarked on its effort.

The purpose of Leesburg's local historic preservation ordinance is three-fold: it creates the Leesburg Board of Architectural Review, outlining the board's powers and duties; establishes the Old and Historic District; and provides for the protection of properties with the H-1 Overlay designation.

It is the Leesburg Town Council that is responsible for the legislative act of designating properties with the H-1 Overlay and formally adopting the design guidelines that are used to evaluate projects in the historic district. By implementing the provisions of the historic zoning ordinance, the Board of Architectural Review acts on behalf of the Town Council.

Leesburg's local historic preservation ordinance:

- provides a municipal policy for the protection of historic properties;
- establishes an objective and democratic process for designating historic properties;

- protects the architectural and historic integrity of designated historic properties; and
- authorizes design guidelines for new development within historic districts to ensure that it is not destructive to the area's historic character.

Leesburg's local historic preservation ordinance does not:

- require that historic properties be open for tours;
- restrict the sale of the property;
- require approval of interior changes or alterations;
- prevent new construction within historic areas; and
- require approval for ordinary repair or maintenance.

The full text of the applicable Zoning Ordinance sections relating to the BAR and the H-1 Overlay District may be found in *Appendix F*.



A view of Leesburg in the late 1700s shows the intersection of Market and King streets.



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### B. Background and Purpose of the Old and Historic District Design Guidelines

The purpose of the Old and Historic District (OHD) Design Guidelines is to ensure that the historic architectural character of individual buildings—and the historic district as a whole—is retained as change occurs over time. The guidelines are not intended to prevent development, but rather to guide it so that any changes, including rehabilitation of existing structures and the construction of new buildings, respect the traditional character of the OHD.

To aid property owners, town staff, and the Board of Architectural Review

(BAR), the town has adopted and updated design guidelines that expand upon the review criteria listed in the Zoning Ordinance.

The first set of guidelines was written in 1977, with revised editions in 1994 and 2000. The Old and Historic District Design Guidelines (2009) build upon this long tradition of design review.

The guidelines are based on the prevailing architectural and site characteristics of the OHD and are tailored to the community. They are a tool for property owners to use when

planning a project and for town staff and the BAR to use when evaluating whether or not a rehabilitation, new construction, or demolition project is appropriate for the OHD.

The guidelines are based on a detailed study of the Old and Historic District. *Chapter III, Section B: Historic District Character and Neighborhoods* identifies the characteristics of development patterns throughout the OHD. *Chapter III, Section C: Architectural Styles* introduces many of the important stylistic features of historic structures in the district.

#### What Guidelines Do

Design guidelines that are well written and clearly illustrated can:

- Assist property owners, developers and other stakeholders with a better understanding of the historic district’s architectural character;
- Provide guidance before property owners, architects/designers and contractors finalize plans;
- Give detailed guidance to property owners, town staff, and the BAR;
- Result in appropriate changes in the district;
- Reduce the potential for the adverse impact of new construction on historic resources;
- Protect current property values in the district; and
- Increase public awareness about the vision for the district.

#### What Guidelines Don’t Do

Design guidelines generally do not:

- Affect the rate or type of new construction or rehabilitation;
- Regulate maintenance;
- Regulate amount/location new development (zoning does that);
- Regulate interior design; and
- Ensure highest quality design.

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It is not the intent of these guidelines to dictate the use of particular architectural forms, styles, or features, but rather to point out the range of solutions and design possibilities available to property owners.

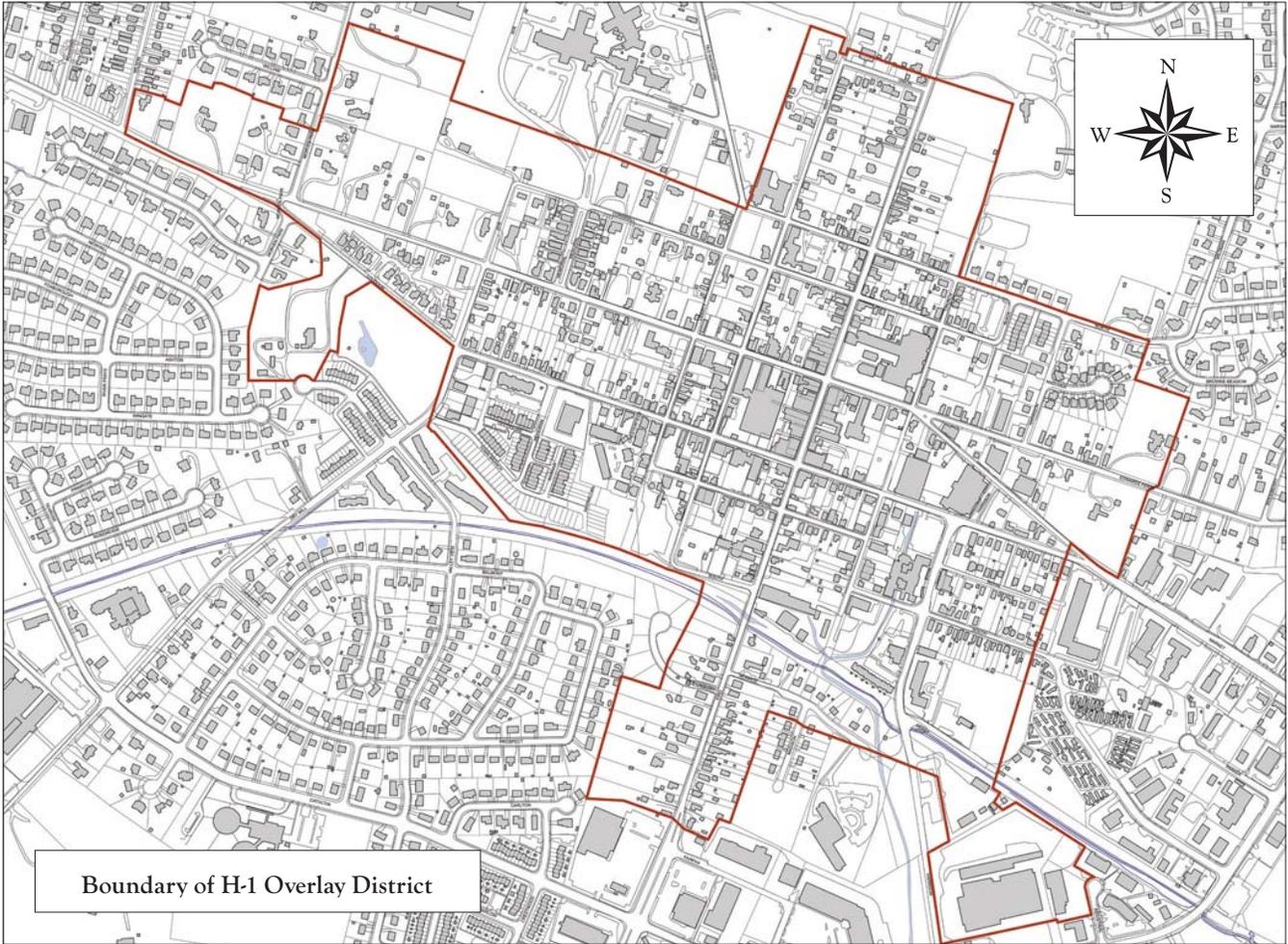
The BAR and town staff evaluate all projects on a case-by-case basis, considering a variety of factors, such as the design and compatibility of the

proposed changes, the architectural character of the surrounding areas, and the impact of the project on historic resources.

These guidelines are written to permit a certain amount of flexibility and are intended to provide a foundation for determining the appropriateness of changes to properties in the OHD.

Above all, the mission of the Town, through the design review program in general and these design guidelines specifically, is to preserve the historic resources and character that represent more than 200 years of development while acknowledging Leesburg's evolution to a thriving twenty-first-century community.

The boundary of overlay zoning for the Town of Leesburg Old and Historic District is shown below.

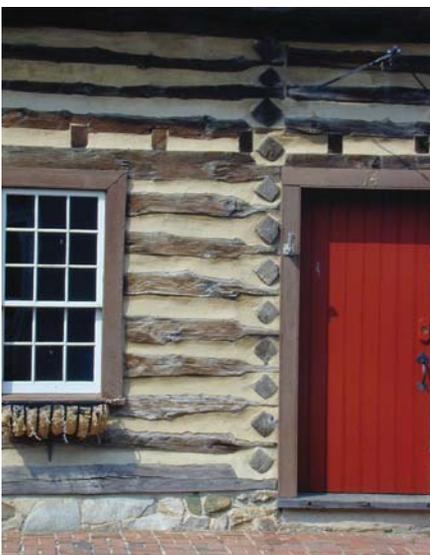




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Historic structures line the downtown streets.



A variety of materials add interest to the district.



Details provide distinguishing characteristics of various architectural styles.

### C. Levels of Review and Receiving a Certificate of Appropriateness

The *Town of Leesburg Zoning Ordinance, Section 7.5: H-1: Old and Historic Overlay District* requires that a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) be issued by the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) or the Preservation Planner before any alteration of a building, structure, or site features (including fences, walls, lamp posts, light fixtures, signs, signposts, driveways, walkways, and paving) is made. Such approval is conditional upon the permitted work being started before the COA expires. Gardening and minor landscaping does not need to be reviewed.

#### 1. Routine Maintenance

No application needs to be filed for routine maintenance. The Town of Leesburg considers the following items routine maintenance:

- Repair of broken windows and doors retaining as much original material as possible;
- Repair or partial in-kind replacement of trim and ornament, where the some of original material has deteriorated sufficiently to warrant replacement;
- Repair or partial in-kind replacement of roofing and siding, where the original material has deteriorated sufficiently to warrant replacement;
- Repair or partial in-kind replacement of fencing and other landscape features; and
- Repainting in the same color.
- Repointing small areas of masonry with mortar of the same color, composition, and mortar joint profile. Consult with the Preservation Planner to determine if your repointing project requires review and approval prior to beginning work.

If you are not sure whether or not your project is considered routine maintenance, contact the Preservation Planner for guidance. Wholesale replacement of roofing material, windows or siding is not considered routine maintenance.

#### 2. Review by the BAR

If a project falls into one of the following types, an application for a COA must be filed and approved prior to beginning work:

- Change in the exterior appearance of existing buildings or structures;
- Demolition of any building or structure in whole or in part;
- Movement of any building or structure;
- Any new construction;
- Reconstruction of existing walls and fences, or construction of new walls and fences; and
- Signs.

#### 3. Administrative Review

The Preservation Planner may administratively review and approve most applications for Certificates of Appropriateness for alterations to existing or installation of new:

- Lamp posts;
- Light fixtures;
- Fences;
- Driveways;
- Residential walkways;
- Changes in existing exterior color schemes; and
- Some signs.

Any other application must be presented to the BAR for review and approval prior to beginning work on the project.

*PLEASE NOTE: Always check the most recent version of the Zoning Ordinance and other governing documents to ensure that your project meets the applicable regulations in the Town of Leesburg (i.e. setback, fence height) and the most recent version of the Design Review Procedures Manual for more information on how to plan a project and obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness.*