

Information Sheet: South Hadley Old Firehouse Museum Local Historic District Proposal

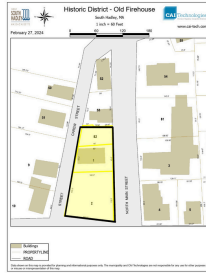
March 2025 version

Who is proposing the Old Firehouse Local Historic District?

The South Hadley Historic District Study Committee is proposing the District. The Study Committee was formed by the Selectboard in 2013 and charged with exploring the possibility of one or more local historic districts in town.

What are the proposed boundaries?

The Committee is proposing a single property district: the Firehouse Museum. In total, the proposal includes three town-owned parcels: the Fred M. Smith Memorial Green, the Firehouse Museum, and the sloped lot to the north (right) of the firehouse. All are owned by the Town of South Hadley.



What is the Historic Districts Act "40C"?

Massachusetts General Law 40C is called the Historic Districts Act. This is the "enabling legislation" for this proposal and outlines the process for creating a legal local historic district in Massachusetts.

Do other nearby towns have Local Historic Districts?

Yes, many if not most of the towns surrounding South Hadley have 40C Local Historic Districts. These include Holyoke, Granby, Chicopee, Amherst, Belchertown, Northampton, Springfield (21) and West Springfield.

Is this the same as the National Register of Historic Places?

They are different. The National Register is largely an honorary designation. It is through the federal Department of the Interior and is not focused on protection of properties. In contrast, Local Historic Districts involve local oversight and focus on the protection of properties and districts. Specifically they attempt to: "preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant in the history of the Commonwealth and its cities and towns."

What are the benefits of a Local Historic District?

The proposed district will first and foremost protect the 1889 Firehouse Museum, an important and iconic building which has been a fixture of South Hadley's history and now houses the Town's historical resources. The district will also support redevelopment efforts in the Falls, will highlight the 1795 Canal and the Canal District, and will elevate all historic work in the Town of South Hadley.

Who will oversee the proposed District?

Following 40C, the South Hadley Selectboard will appoint a seven person commission to oversee the District.

What is the scope of the oversight Commission?

Commissions review changes to the exterior features of a property visible from a public way. They don't review interior changes. They would also review any new construction within the district. The Study Committee has included all optional exemptions in the proposal: temporary signs and structures, light fixtures, paint color, roof color, etc. Maintenance and landscaping are always exempted.

Will the Commission tell nearby homeowners what they can do and not do?

The Commission would have no authority over any other properties or parcels.

Who ultimately decides if the District should be created?

Local Historic Districts are created by town councils - in our case Town Meeting. This District will be included on the agenda for the May 2025 Town Meeting. 40C requires a two-thirds affirmative vote.

Who has reviewed the proposal to date?

The proposal was submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and the South Hadley Planning Board on May 15th, 2024. To date, it has been endorsed by the MHC, the SH Planning Board, the SH Selectboard, the SH Redevelopment Authority, the SH Trustees of the Old Firehouse Museum, the SH Historical Commission, and the SH Falls Neighborhood Association. All votes have been unanimous.

The Study Committee held the public hearing in September 2024. Members of the public in attendance had positive comments about the proposal and asked how they could further support the effort.

What are the next steps?

The next step will be the vote at Town Meeting in May 2025.

Where can I see the documents

All documents are available on the Town website or use this QR code.
<https://www.southhadley.org/1267/11843/Other-Community-Plans-and-Reports>



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