

get ready for the

Old Firehouse Museum Local Historic District



proposed by the South Hadley Historic District Study
Committee for consideration at Town Meeting - May 2025

Question:

Who is proposing the Old Firehouse Museum Local Historic District

Answer:

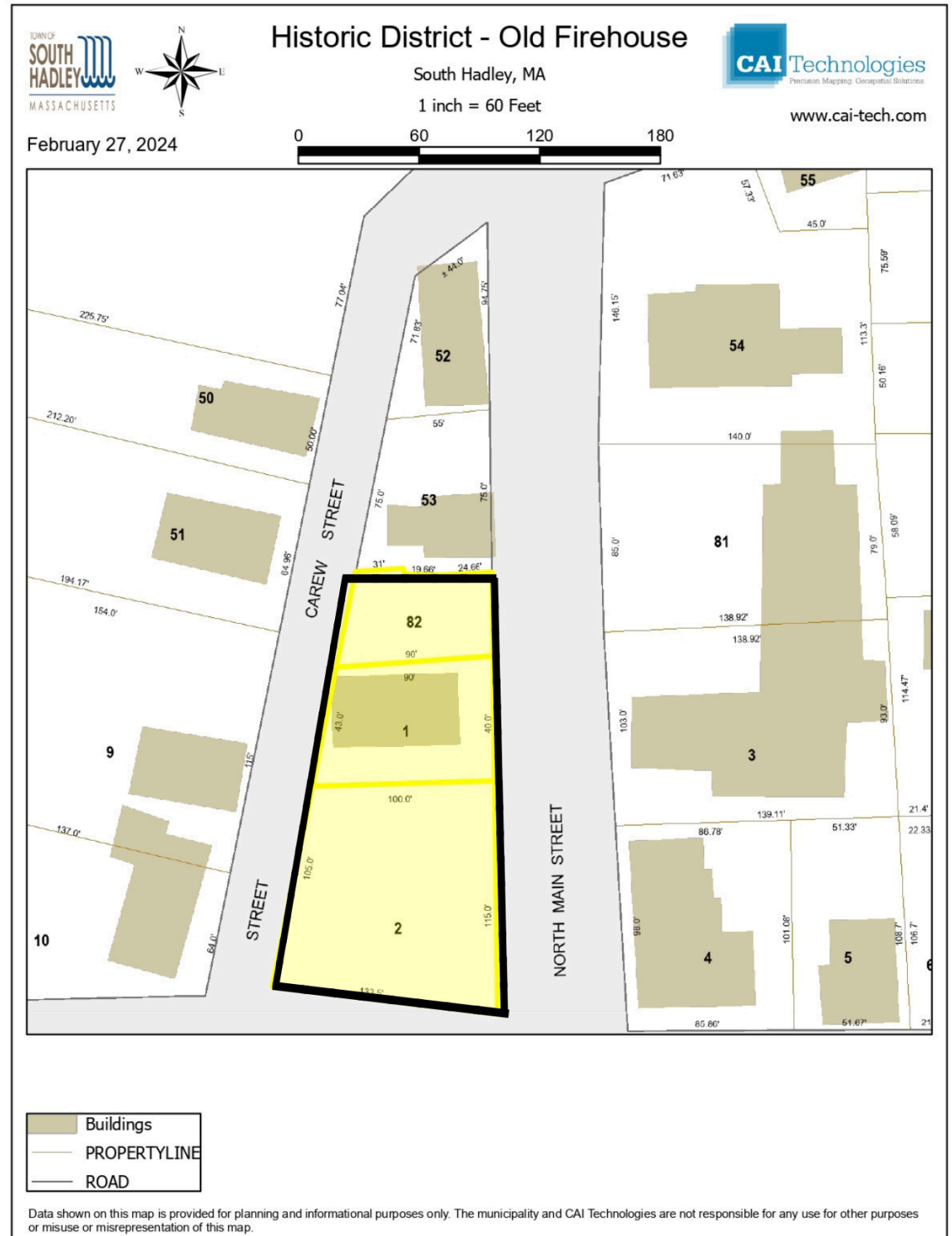
The **South Hadley Historic District Study Committee** is proposing the District. The Study Committee was formed by the Selectboard in 2013 and charged with exploring the possibility of one or more local historic districts in town.

Question:

What are the proposed boundaries?

Answer:

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.



Question:

What is the historical importance of this district?

Answer:

The proposed District" is in the Falls which is vitally important in South Hadley's history. In the 18th and 19th centuries this part of town was a busy commercial and industrial area known as Canal Village, home to the first commercially successful navigable canal in the country.



Today the Old Firehouse Museum is a gem of the Falls, housing South Hadley's important historical records and artifacts. This district is across the street from the remnants of the 1795 canal, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.



Question:

What is the Historic Districts Act
“40C”?

Answer:

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.

ESTABLISHING LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Chair, Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc
mhc@sec.state.ma.us / 617-727-8470

Question:

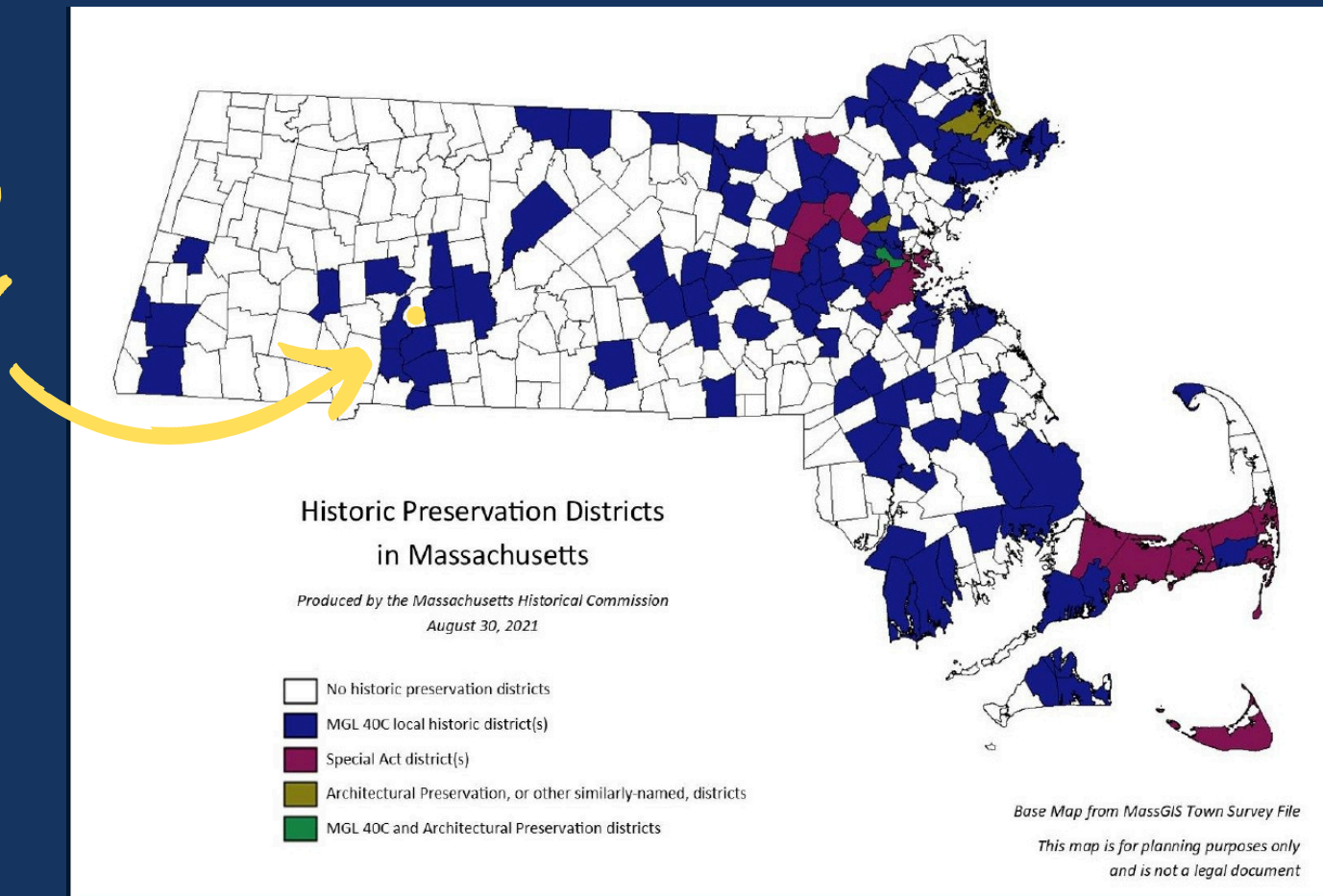
Do other nearby towns have local historic districts?

Answer:

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 local historic districts!) and West Springfield. The 40C local historic districts are in blue on this map:

**SOUTH
HADLEY**

**CURRENTLY NO
40C DISTRICT**



Question:

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

Answer:

They are different. The National Register is largely an **honorary designation** -- it is a federal designation and does not focus on the 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.”**

SOUTH HADLEY HAS FOUR NATIONAL REGISTER LISTINGS



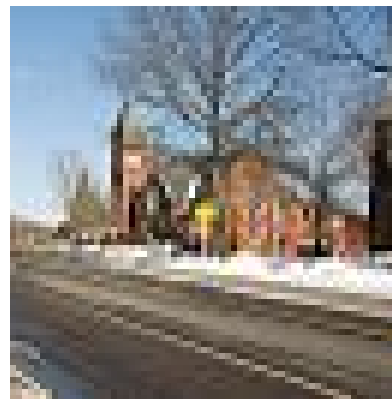
WOODBIDGE STREET
HISTORIC DISTRICT

listed 11/14/83
28 properties



CANAL HISTORIC
DISTRICT

Canal was individually listed in
1978; in 3/11/1992 the District
was listed with 32 properties



1ST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH

listed 3/3/20



SOUTH HADLEY POST
OFFICE

listed 5/28/86

Question:

What are the benefits of a local historic district?

Answer:

The proposed district will first and foremost protect the 1889 firehouse, 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.

Question:

Tell me more about the firehouse and its role as a museum

Answer:

The Firehouse on North Main was built in 1889 and was home to the first volunteer fire fighting company in South Hadley. They had an impressive hand-pumper engine (now on display).

From the beginning, the Firehouse was also used for various civic and public functions - a polling place, a graduation site, a meeting hall, and a social hall.

After 85 years, a new firehouse was built on Newton Street in 1974. Two years later the South Hadley Historical Society reopened the Firehouse on North Main as the Old Firehouse Museum to highlight the town's history.



Question:

Who was Fred M. Smith?

Answer:

Fred Merwin Smith was a much loved resident of South Hadley who lived from 1862 to 1928. He was considered to be the epitome of a loyal and tireless public servant. Someone on our committee likes to say he was "Mr. South Hadley".

He held many positions: leader of the Republican Party, a member of the School Committee, Town Treasurer, Water Commissioner, Master of the Mount Holyoke Chapter of Masons, Town Moderator, and member of the Massachusetts legislature. He also headed the local draft board in World War I; his letter collection with draftees is now housed at the Firehouse Museum.

The Memorial Green was dedicated in his name in 1930, two years after his death.



Question:

Who has reviewed this proposal to date?

Answer:

The Committee has closely followed the steps in “40C”. 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 many additional groups. We had one one required public hearing Sept 21, 2024 - the response from the public was “how can we help?”

ENDORSEMENTS TO DATE (MARCH 9, 2025)

*step required by 40C

- Massachusetts Historical Commission*
- South Hadley Planning Board*
- South Hadley Selectboard
- Trustees of the Old Firehouse Museum
- South Hadley Redevelopment Authority
- South Hadley Historical Commission
- South Hadley Falls Neighborhood Association
- participants at public hearing*

We'd be delighted to add your group, business, organization, etc.!

Question:

Who decides if we have a local historic district

Answer:

South Hadley Town Meeting.

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.

Question:

If I live near the district, will the commission try to tell me what to do?

Answer:

The oversight commission would only be authorized to look at **exterior features visible from a public viewpoint in the district area** (as well as new construction in the district area). The commission would have no authority over any other properties

Districts can be enlarged, but **there is no shortcut** - it would go through the full process, as with a new district

Question:

Does this require
fundraising?

Answer:

No, in fact it can help the
Town to get historic grants in
general.

Question:

How can I support this district?

Answer:

We welcome all support now and going forward! Talk about it, tell others, visit the Museum and walk around the Memorial Green. We want everyone to enjoy and celebrate our first local historic district!

This will demonstrate how South Hadley cares deeply about preserving and protecting its historical heritage.

This is a gift to future generations!