

# SO YOU OWN A LANDMARK PROPERTY ...

*Technical Paper No. 15*



**King County**

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## **“But my building isn't like the Smith Tower...”**

It may not be, nonetheless, your building has been formally recognized for its historic and/or architectural significance. Whether your Landmark is a small bungalow cottage or a distinctive Queen Anne mansion, it is valued as an important part of the heritage of your neighborhood and King County. We are very fortunate that fine examples of 19th and early 20th C. architecture, constructed by our pioneer founders and their descendants, continue to be part of our daily lives. It is this rich and varied collection of historic buildings, sites, objects, structures and cultural landscapes that helps to make King County a truly unique region. It is now our shared responsibility to continue to recognize this rich heritage and to preserve it for future generations.

Our communities are good places to live, work, raise a family, and retire because of the historic character of our neighborhoods. In order to maintain this historic character, King County began an historic preservation program in 1980 that both identifies and reviews changes to significant historic buildings. To carry out the program, the County established a Landmarks Commission made up of county residents who volunteer their time and knowledge to preserve and protect historic buildings. In addition to designating buildings as King County or Community Landmarks, the Commission also reviews proposed changes to Landmarks, as well as plans for demolition and new construction.

## **“Does this mean I can't paint my house purple?”**

The County's historic preservation regulations do not force property owners to maintain their properties in a certain way or to undertake a restoration project. However, there are certain projects that require special review. Any alteration to a specifically designated feature of the building or site, usually involving changes in the exterior appearance of the building or site is subject to a design review process. Something that may seem insignificant, such as the replacement of a window or the application of new aluminum siding, could seriously alter the historic character and value of the Landmark. Well-established design guidelines that are used to review alterations and additions to historic buildings have been adopted by the Landmarks Commission and are available from the Historic Preservation Program.

## **“But are there any benefits to owning a Landmark?”**

The Landmarks Commission continues to advocate for various incentive programs designed to benefit the owners of designated historic buildings. Owners of a King County Landmark have access to various programs that could decrease property taxes as well as low-interest loans for restoration projects and in some cases outright grant programs. The Historic Preservation Program also makes available a wide range of technical assistance and rehabilitation/restoration

sources. For more information see *Incentive Programs for Landmark Owners* (Technical Paper No. 11).

**Landmark Designation Does:**

- Preserve and protect important historic buildings, sites, objects, and structures in King County
- Encourage additional historic research and the distribution of information about historic buildings and districts
- Foster civic pride and appreciation of our heritage
- Provide technical assistance, restoration and rehabilitation information to interested individuals and property owners
- Provide loan and grant monies for restoration of designated landmarks
- Allow for the cost of approved rehabilitation work to be deducted from the assessed value of the property
- Require review of alterations to designated features of significance
- Require review of demolitions and new construction within the boundaries of a designated property or an historic district
- Improve the economy of the area by promoting local history if property owners choose to do so
- Stabilize and improve property values in historic districts if property owners choose to take advantage of available incentives

**Landmark Designation Does Not:**

- Require specific improvements or restoration of the building
- Automatically prevent a property owner from making changes to a building
- Automatically regulate the selection of paint colors for a building
- Require review of ordinary maintenance or in-kind replacement of architectural features or existing building materials
- Require that the building be open to the public
- Force businesses to change signage
- Require placement of historical markers or plaques