



CITY OF LABELLE · HISTORIC PRESERVATION

How Historic Preservation Works

A plain-language guide — and the case for becoming a Certified Local Government

Prepared for the LaBelle City Commission · 2026

Why this is worth doing

1

Identity

Historic buildings are what make downtown LaBelle feel like LaBelle — a real place, not anywhere.

2

Economy

A cared-for historic district supports Main Street, tourism, and private investment downtown.

3

Value & pride

Designation and reinvestment tend to stabilize property values and build civic pride.

The city already has a downtown historic district and a preservation ordinance — this is about making the program work and unlocking its benefits.

START HERE

“Recognized” is not “Protected”



RECOGNIZED

A survey documents a building as historic. It is a research and planning tool.

No rules attach. The owner can change or even demolish it without review.



PROTECTED

Local designation under Chapter 8.7 is what adds the rules.

Only then does review (a Certificate of Appropriateness) apply to changes.

This single distinction clears up most of the confusion about historic preservation.

Three levels of “historic”

1

Survey

IDENTIFY

Documents that a building is historic.
A planning tool — no rules.

2

National Register

HONOR

A federal list. Prestige and access to
tax credits — but still no local rules.

3

Local designation

RULES

The only level that triggers local
review of changes.

Bottom line: only local designation makes the review process apply. Survey and National Register do not, on their own.

THE PROGRAM

What is a Certified Local Government?

A Certified Local Government (CLG) is a **formal partnership** between a city, the State (through the Florida Division of Historical Resources), and the National Park Service.



In plain terms: LaBelle joins the national preservation team — and gets the help and money that come with membership.

WHY DO IT

What LaBelle gets out of it



Grant money

At least 10% of Florida's federal preservation funds are reserved for CLGs — money non-CLGs can't touch.



Free expert help

Training and technical assistance from the state preservation office.



Tax credits

CLG status supports owners using the 20% federal rehabilitation tax credit.



A seat at the table

The city reviews National Register nominations and shapes what happens locally.

The five things a CLG must have

1

A preservation ordinance — the local law — LaBelle's Chapter 8.7

2

A qualified review board — the Historic Preservation Board

3

A survey & inventory — a list of historic properties (update grant pending)

4

Public participation — open meetings, notice, public hearings

5

Satisfactory performance — actually doing the work and reporting to the state

LaBelle already has, or is actively building, all five.

THE PLAYERS

Who does what

Property owner

Applies to make changes; maintains the property.

City staff

Takes applications, issues routine approvals, supports the board.

Historic Preservation Board

Decides major cases, recommends designations, keeps the survey.

City Commission

Adopts the law, appoints the board, sets policy.

State & National Park Service

Certify, fund, train, and set the standards.

THE BOARD

The Historic Preservation Board



Five appointed citizens

Appointed by the Mayor at the Commission's recommendation · demonstrated interest in preservation · staggered 4-year terms.

What the board does

- Reviews Certificates of Appropriateness (the bigger cases)
- Recommends properties and districts for designation
- Maintains the historic survey and inventory
- Reviews National Register nominations
- Reports to the state and promotes preservation

THE RULES

Two documents run the program

THE LAW

Chapter 8.7

What is regulated and how. Adopted by the Commission as an ordinance; it creates the board and the review process.

THE HOW-TO

Design Guidelines

What good work looks like. Adopted by resolution—the board keeps it current without changing the law.

Together they answer the two questions an owner has: “Do I need approval?” and “What will they be looking for?”

“What if it’s my building?”

ROUTINE WORK

Meets the guidelines?

Staff can approve it — usually within 21 days. No hearing needed.

MAJOR WORK

Demolition, additions, new building?

Goes to the board for a public hearing — a decision within 45 days.

Good news: Ordinary maintenance, repairs with the same materials, interior work, and paint (in most cases) need no review at all.

How a property or district gets designated

1 Prepare — Staff writes a designation report — significance and boundaries.

2 Notify — Owners and agencies are notified; a public hearing is set.

3 Hearing — The board holds a public hearing.

4 Decide — The board approves, denies, or amends — in writing.

5 Record — The designation is recorded with the Clerk of Court.

Who has to agree?

One building:

needs the owner's written consent.

A district:

no consent threshold — decided at the public hearing.

A SEPARATE HONOR

The National Register (a different thing)

A federal “honor roll” of historic places. It’s separate from local designation — a property can be on one, both, or neither.

1

Prestige + tax credits

Listing unlocks the 20% federal rehab tax credit for income-producing buildings.

2

Owners can object

A notarized owner objection can stop a listing. That’s why it runs through a public meeting.

3

Board recommends only

LaBelle’s board reviews and recommends — the State and National Park Service make the call.

THE UPSIDE

What's in it for people

Up to 50%

property-tax exemption on qualifying rehabilitation (the city has adopted this).

20%

federal income-tax credit for certified rehab of income-producing historic buildings.

Building-code & flood relief

Historic-appropriate paths under the Building Code, and a possible FEMA “50% Rule” exemption.

Grants & Main Street

Access to CLG grant funds and momentum for the downtown Main Street effort.

HOW WE COMPARE

LaBelle vs. peer Certified Local Governments

Most Florida CLGs offer the homeowner rehabilitation exemption — in fact, in CLG cities the local board reviews these applications, so the program is built around CLGs offering it.

PEER CLGs OFFER IT

Residential rehab exemption (§ 196.1997) — up to 10 years

- ✓ DeLand
- ✓ St. Petersburg
- ✓ Fort Lauderdale

DeLand is the closest match — a small city with a mostly residential historic district.

LABELLE TODAY

- ✓ Commercial / nonprofit exemption (§ 196.1961)
- ✗ No residential rehab exemption — a homeowner gets nothing today

...and the historic district is mostly homes.

The fix: adopting § 196.1997 brings LaBelle in line with peer CLGs — and it's the exemption that fits our residential district.

What the Chapter 8.7 amendment changes

The board

Five appointed members (today the board is the Commission itself); professional where practicable; four-year staggered terms.

Why — CLG expects a qualified board, separate from the elected body.

Owners & process

Owner consent to designate an individual property; design guidelines adopted by reference so the board keeps them current; flood-code relief recognized.

Why — a clearer, fairer process for property owners.

Incentives & enforcement

A new residential rehabilitation tax exemption (§ 8.7-26); civil penalties dedicated to the preservation trust fund.

Why — real upside for owners; penalties recycle into preservation.

Housekeeping & compliance

Updated defunct state-agency names; added CLG definitions; conformed the standards to 36 CFR Part 61.

Why — brings the ordinance in line with the CLG program.

The board becomes an appointed body

TODAY

Chapter 8.7 currently makes the historic preservation board the five elected City Commissioners themselves.

THE AMENDMENT

A separate five-member board, appointed by the Mayor at the Commission's recommendation, chosen for demonstrated knowledge of and interest in historic preservation.

WHY IT MATTERS

The CLG program requires a qualified review board, and keeping the case-by-case (quasi-judicial) review separate from the elected body protects due process. It is the near-universal structure among Certified Local Governments.

Member qualifications and terms

TODAY

No qualification standard or fixed terms — the seats are simply the Commission seats.

THE AMENDMENT

Members must have demonstrated preservation interest or knowledge; professionals are appointed where practicable; staggered four-year terms; vacancies filled within 60 days.

WHY IT MATTERS

These are CLG membership rules. Four-year staggered terms give continuity, and the “where practicable” standard — with documented recruitment effort — lets a small city qualify even without local professionals to serve.

Owner consent to designate an individual property

TODAY

The board may designate an individual property or a district without the owner's consent — owners are notified and heard, but cannot block it.

THE AMENDMENT

Designating an individual site now requires the owner's written consent. Districts still proceed on notice and public hearing, with no consent threshold.

WHY IT MATTERS

Individual designation adds real duties to a single property, so requiring consent lowers legal and political risk — while keeping the district tool workable so a few holdouts can't block a broadly supported district.

Penalties funneled into preservation

TODAY

Civil penalties collected under the chapter flow to the general fund.

THE AMENDMENT

Penalties under §§ 8.7-20 and 8.7-22 are dedicated to the Historic Preservation Board Trust Fund (§ 8.7-23).

WHY IT MATTERS

It recycles enforcement dollars back into preservation — emergency repairs after a storm or fire, property acquisition, grants, or staffing — rather than into general revenue.

Flood-code relief for historic buildings

TODAY

Chapter 8.7 says nothing about flood regulations or the FEMA “50% Rule.”

THE AMENDMENT

A new provision recognizes that designated and National-Register properties may qualify for the National Flood Insurance Program’s historic-structure exemption, cross-referencing the City’s floodplain ordinance and FEMA.

WHY IT MATTERS

The 50% Rule can force a flooded historic building to be elevated — destroying its character. The exemption protects that character; the amendment flags the benefit without overstepping the floodplain ordinance.

Design guidelines adopted by reference

TODAY

The ordinance refers to “guidelines for preservation” generally, pointing mainly to the federal Standards.

THE AMENDMENT

The City of LaBelle Design Guidelines are adopted by resolution as the standard for certificates of appropriateness; the board may amend them at a public meeting, without a code amendment.

WHY IT MATTERS

It gives the guidelines real legal force while keeping them current — the board can update a technical document as materials and practice evolve, without a full ordinance amendment every time.

A tax break homeowners can actually use

TODAY

The only historic tax exemption on the books (§ 8.7-25) reaches commercial and nonprofit properties open to the public — not ordinary homes.

THE AMENDMENT

A new § 8.7-26 adds the F.S. § 196.1997 exemption: up to ten years of relief on the added value a rehabilitation creates — available to residential or commercial owners.

WHY IT MATTERS

The district is mostly houses, so today's exemption helps almost none of the owners being asked to accept designation. Peer CLGs like DeLand and St. Petersburg already offer this one. It evens the deal for homeowners and encourages preservation.

Outdated state-agency references fixed

TODAY

The ordinance repeatedly refers to the “Southeast Florida Regional Preservation Office,” which no longer exists.

THE AMENDMENT

References updated by function — the Division of Historical Resources (Bureau of Archaeological Research) for regulatory matters, and the Florida Public Archeology Network for consultation and guidance.

WHY IT MATTERS

The old office is gone; dead references make those provisions unworkable. This keeps the archaeology and review procedures operable and accurate.

The Certified Local Government requirements

TODAY

The ordinance predates the City's pursuit of CLG status and lacks several federally required provisions.

THE AMENDMENT

Adds open-meeting/Sunshine requirements, the state-reporting cadence (30-day meeting notices, an annual report), National Register nomination review, updated definitions, and the 36 CFR 61.3 standards requirement.

WHY IT MATTERS

These are the specific things 36 CFR Part 61 requires to become and remain a Certified Local Government — the core purpose of the whole amendment, and what unlocks the grants, training, and tax-credit access.

What's ready — and the ask

READY NOW

- Amended Chapter 8.7 ordinance (draft)
- Design guidelines (draft)
- Board rules of procedure (draft)
- Application forms & meeting templates (draft)
- Conflict-of-interest policy & process maps (draft)

STILL TO DO

- Appoint the five-member board
- City Attorney: confirm charter/appointment authority
- Adopt the ordinance & guidelines
- Finish the survey update (grant pending)
- Jurisdiction map of designated properties

The ask: adopt the ordinance · appoint the board · then pursue certification.