

## Historic Overlay District - TJPDC Presentation Notes

### Mineral Planning Commission Meeting

March 27, 2025

#### Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about overlay districts and discuss the potential for the PDC to support establishing one in your town through a zoning code update.

As you know, Mineral is fortunate to have a significant historic district already listed on the National Register of Historic Places<sup>1</sup> and Virginia Landmarks Register<sup>2</sup>. These designations recognize the unique architectural, natural, and cultural heritage that makes the town special. The town's mining history contributes to the community's identity, character, and local economy, and can be leveraged as an asset.

With over 230 contributing resources within the currently designated historic district, there are many worth protecting.<sup>3</sup> This designation is different from an overlay district; Listing an area as a Historic District through the National Register of Historic Places is only an honorary designation, which has benefits in educating communities about their unique historic and natural assets but does not involve any regulation of property within the district.

- Landowners can alter and demolish buildings as they see fit
- Landowners may be eligible for state and federal tax credits to restore historic structures

Only locally designated historic overlay districts are subject to local zoning regulation. Most historic districts listed on the State and National Registers do not have local historic zoning overlay district designation. Those that do are similar in make up to the town of Mineral as in they are generally in cities and towns where the buildings are in close proximity and have a collective visual impact – like a Main Street. Local examples of historic overlay districts include

- [Town of Culpeper](#)
- [Town of Leesburg](#)
- [Multiple in Charlottesville](#)
- [Town of Gordonsville](#)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/programs/historic-registers/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://vcris.dhr.virginia.gov/VCRIS/Mapviewer/>

## Connecting to the Comprehensive Plan

As highlighted in the recently updated Comprehensive Plan<sup>4</sup>, the importance of preserving Mineral's historic resources is recognized clearly throughout. Specifically, the plan identifies an action to: "Work with the Mineral Historic Foundation to create a Historic Overlay District and define its borders." This action also aligns with other goals and objectives outlined in your plan, such as

- Revitalizing historic landmarks
- Encouraging property owners to invest in renovations and maintenance to preserve Mineral's historic buildings
- Promoting infill of commercial businesses in the historic downtown, and even
- Replacing streetlights with historic style options that provide a flag display and lighting for sidewalks.

Historic overlay districts are a key tool available to help the town achieve not only these specific objectives and actions but also support the broader vision for Mineral's future.

## Defining Historic Overlay Districts

This zoning tool doesn't replace existing zoning but adds specificity to ensure any new construction, changes, or demolitions honor the area's historic charm. It's a way to shape development that respects and celebrates what makes these places special. These districts are created through the local zoning process, involving public input and commission and council approval, with the direct goal of protecting historic sites and maintaining property values by setting safeguards to preserve the historic character of buildings as time goes on. Often, a local Architectural Review Board is appointed to approve renovations within these historic zones to assess the appropriateness of building renovations and other alterations.

## Key Elements of an Overlay District

While the specific regulations can be tailored to the unique needs of a community, historic overlay districts typically include elements like:

- **Purpose Statement:** This section clearly lays out the objective of the overlay district, such as creating a board of architectural review, establishing its powers and duties, establishing the district and providing protection of properties within the district.
- **Applicability:** This defines the extent or geographic area where the overlay zone will apply. It specifies the underlying zoning districts that will be affected and clearly outlines the types of development that will be subject to the overlay's

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.townofmineral.com/media/896>

regulations. This provides clarity for property owners and developers. Most of this district would likely overlay the light commercial district which encompasses Mineral Ave, but depends on what the town and public feedback determines as most applicable/appropriate.

- **Procedural and Approval Requirements:** This section outlines any additional permitting or procedural steps required for projects within the overlay. It details submission requirements and clarifies the role of any review bodies or boards in the approval process. This ensures projects are reviewed with the necessary expertise for historic preservation (Appointees may include members of Mineral's historic foundation, local officials, state historic preservation officers, experts from within the larger county/ community).
  - **Not all changes may be subject to review.** For example, interior features and improvements, exterior color, and routine maintenance may be exempt from requiring a historic district permit. Proposed construction, reconstruction, alteration or restoration of buildings or structures, are examples of projects that may meet standards for review. What is subject to review would be determined through public input.
- **Use Regulations (Changes to Underlying Zoning):** While the overlay primarily focuses on design, it can sometimes include specific adjustments to the permitted uses within the underlying zoning district to ensure compatibility with the historic character. This would be carefully considered to support the overall vision for the district.
- **Overlay Criteria:** This is where the substantive requirements of the zone are detailed. This would include things like specific architectural guidelines, parking requirements, and potentially outlining requirements for accessing any available incentives for historic preservation. These criteria are the heart of how the historic character is protected and enhanced.

These elements work together to create a framework that encourages preservation while allowing for appropriate development and adaptation, based on the Town's vision, goals, and public feedback.

## Benefits and Considerations

Implementing historic overlay districts offers numerous benefits:

- **Preservation of Character:** The most obvious benefit is the protection of Mineral's unique identity and the historic fabric that defines it.
- **Increased Property Values:** Studies have shown that historic districts can lead to increased property values due to the desirability of living in well-maintained, character-rich areas.

- **Economic Development:** Historic districts can attract tourism, foster local businesses, and create a sense of place that benefits the entire community.
- **Community Pride:** Preserving history strengthens community identity and fosters a sense of pride in our town.
- **Sustainable Development:** Reusing and adapting existing buildings is often more sustainable than new construction.

It's also important to acknowledge potential considerations:

- **Regulations on Property Owners:** There can be perceived limitations on what property owners can do with their buildings, although the goal is to find a balance between preservation and property rights.
- **Administrative Costs:** Establishing and administering a historic overlay district involves time and resources from the Town.
- **The overlay zone should be an enhancement to the existing zoning,** not a complete alternative. It is important to ensure that the overlay still aligns with existing zoning classifications.

### **Moving Forward: Scope and Schedule**

To help you further consider this, we've outlined a potential scope of work and a preliminary schedule without knowing your budget and the specifics of how the town would like to work through this process. Our proposed scope would span through summer into early fall and includes:

- **Assessment and planning:** This would involve a more detailed survey of the extent of overlay district, engaging with an appointed steering committee, and analyzing existing conditions and data.
- **Development of Draft Overlay District Regulations:** We would work closely with staff, elected officials, the public and historic foundation to draft specific zoning language tailored to your town's needs.
- **Community Engagement:** This is a critical step that is woven throughout this scope, involving public information sessions and or workshops, and opportunities for feedback from residents and businesses, such as at required public hearings to support code adoption.
- **Implementation:** We would present our findings and proposed regulations to the Planning Commission and Town Council for adoption and support implementation by developing educational resources for the public, a checklist or Standard Operating Procedure for use by residents, staff, and the review board.

Our preliminary schedule anticipates that initial research will be completed by the end of May, draft regulations by Mid- August, and public hearings held in August and November. This is a starting point, and we look forward to working with you and the council to refine this process.

### **Conclusion**

Exploring implementation of historic overlay districts is a step towards fulfilling the vision and goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan and helps ensure the long-term preservation of Mineral's character. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time and consideration.