

# HISTORIC REAL ESTATE

*buying and selling homes in historic districts*

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It can be easy to fall in love with the homes that represent the timeless and storied history of the Hudson Valley and beyond. As a home buyer, our dream homes typically mirror what we value most in a property, and perhaps most importantly, the place where we live.

In our area, there are more than a few homes, properties, and villages with "historic" designations. Nestled in the hollows carved out by centuries in the Northeast there are historic homes with the charm and structure many find to be a rarity in the 21st century. Depending on its style or the era when it was built, a historic home can feature many intricacies that are unique to early American life. From moldings to fireplaces, historic homes can be as charming in allure as they are interesting in historic designation.

Though the many fears of the potential buyer of an historic home are well known, there is perhaps no more befuddling issue for the prospective home buyer than those aspects that are present outside of the home itself. The rules and regulations, some of which are dependent on certain factors, and some which are wildly misconstrued, can hold some buyers back from purchasing the home of their dreams as well as a piece of history. Of course,

each historic district is different and regulations can vary depending on district. Area experts are here to help untangle this seemingly impossible Gordian Knot of confusion. From real estate agents to town officials, it's time to understand some facts about the local landmarks we could potentially call home.

### Historic Town Designation

One of the first things to know when it comes to potentially purchasing a historic home is where it is located. When a town or village receives a historic designation it can be common for residents to become confused about what they can, and what they perceive they cannot do to their homes. Hillsdale, NY, town supervisor Peter Czapkowski has been on the town board for over a decade and understands many of the common misconceptions associated with historic designations:

### How do towns receive historic designations in NY state?

PC: Typically, a committee has the approval of the town board and partners with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The state evaluates the district and a robust historical survey is provided to them by the town.



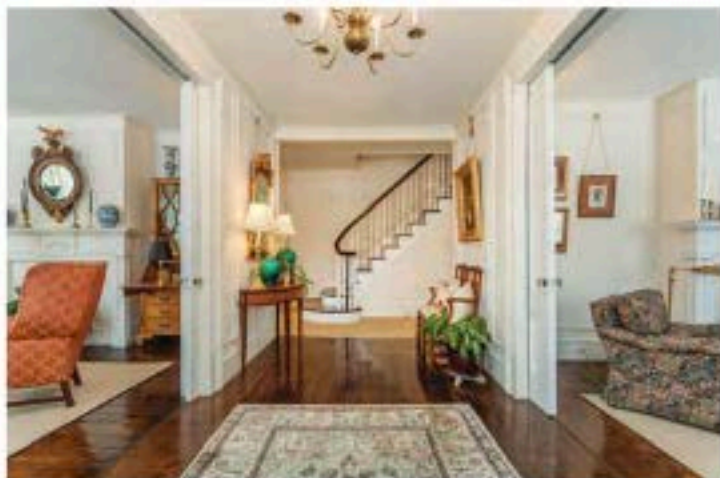
### What is a historical survey and how does it help town residents?

PC: The historical survey is everything and includes the backstory of the district and various buildings inside the district. It's an expensive but important step to getting recognized by the state. The advantage for homeowners is the availability of certain tax credits for the simplest of upgrades to full-scale renovations. Research shows that the recognition of a town's history and the preservation of its buildings that tell a story generate economic growth, they go hand-in-hand.

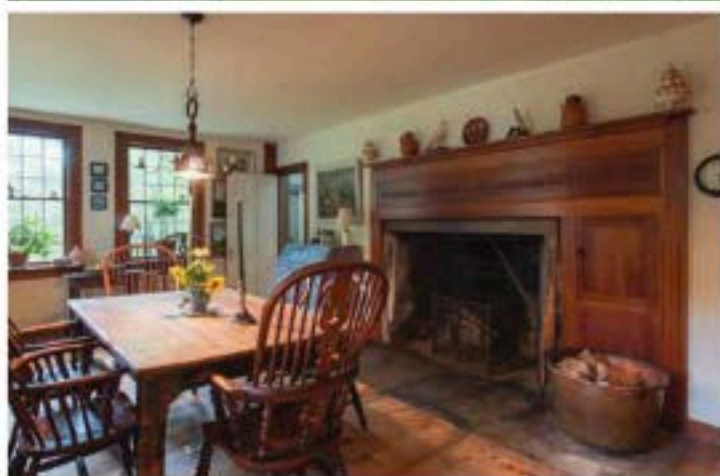
### Any truth to the perceptions surrounding home renovation in a historic district?

PC: Owning a building in a historic district does NOT mean you can't renovate your house the way you want to. [In Hillsdale] there is no governance over what color you want to paint your house or whether or not you want to replace your porch or windows. Homeowners still have the right to do whatever they want to with their property. In fact, because they live in a (historic)

Above and below, left: A property on the Sharon Green that is currently listed by Klemm Real Estate. This house dates from 1850, is located within Sharon's historic district, and is listed for \$795,000.



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Above: A property located in Salisbury-Lakeville that was recently listed by Elyse Harney Real Estate. This house dates from 1775, and was listed for \$982,000.

district, they can apply for tax credits to replace something as simple as a furnace! It's a win-win.

**Buying and selling historic homes and owning homes in historic districts**

From a town official's perspective, the designation of a historic district does not necessarily mean impediments arise when it comes to buying or renovating a historic home. Surprisingly, from a realtor's perspective, the process of buying or selling a historic home is only slightly different.

Graham Klemm, a lifelong resident of Sharon, CT, and a licensed realtor at his family's firm Klemm Real Estate for over twenty years has been helping people find their historic dream homes within the heart of the Sharon Green and beyond. Klemm also spent ten years as part of the Sharon Historic Commission, giving him intimate knowledge as to the logistics involved with buying or selling a historic home.

"It can be a bit of a mixed bag sometimes," he says of looking for the best value. "We have a very active Historic Commission in Sharon, and there are some amazing historic homes here."

Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages for buyers who are considering purchasing a historic home. According to Klemm, sometimes it is all about location, "There is certainly a difference between buying in town versus a more rural location. Historic homes outside of town tend to be a bit more expensive – although for some, the advantage of privacy outweighs the price point."

For Klemm, buying a home within a historic district has multiple advantages: "Sure, it's true, historic homes in town will inherently come with less land and less privacy, but the prices are almost always lower and buyers benefit from the layer of protection the Historical Commissions provide, giving you better value for your dollar."

For home renovations, that layer of protection can prove to be invaluable. There is no legislation in Sharon, CT, for example, if the owners want to replace a roof with the same materials, that govern whether or not they can do so. "Commissions are run by people," Klemm says. "There's always a communal aspect when it comes to relationships with homeowners, commissions are there to help in any way they can."

Similarly, Thomas Callahan and Elyse Harney of Elyse Harney Real Estate in Salisbury, CT, see buying homes in historic districts as having many advantages for the potential buyer. Both real estate veterans feel buyers who appreciate the historic nature of a building should consider purchasing a home within a historic district.

"That's why people come to New England," says Elyse Harney,

a woman who has seen the area evolve since she established her real estate business in her family home in 1987, and has lived and worked in the area since 1957. Her feelings on the value of Historic Commissions echo the praise of others, "Commissions, like the one here in Salisbury, are vital to maintaining the integrity of our homes. These homes are loaded with history and our commission benefits owners by preserving that integrity as well as the value of their homes."

"Everyone works together when it comes to the commission and homeowners," says Thomas Callahan, a former member of the Wall Street scene who has spent the last two decades with his partner working for Elyse Harney, as well as restoring historic homes around Litchfield County – including the Benjamin Tallmadge house in Litchfield.

"We've worked with homeowners on everything from solar panels to shutters. For the most part, houses built in the nineteenth century are foundationally as solid as they come. When we have discussions with both potential buyers, sellers, as well as the homeowners themselves they are just that, discussions, because we encourage as much communication as possible. Everything the commission works toward is done for the sole purpose of preserving our downtown area."

This year, as they do every other year, the commission in Salisbury will hold a reception at the Ragamont Inn, where everyone in the district is invited to come together over cocktails to do what communities in our area do best: work together for the betterment of the place we call home. \*