



# *Owning a House in a Local Historic District*

**P**erhaps you're planning on buying a house in the Rochelle Park-Rochelle Heights Local Historic District. Maybe you already own one, but you don't know how the historic district affects your house and property. Someone told you that if you own a house in this neighborhood, you have to get permission to make any exterior changes, even to paint or plant tulips. You're asking "What kinds of changes can I really make?" If you're confused, you're not alone. This brochure was designed to help you sort out a lot of information and tell you how to get more information if you need it.



Stone pillars were designed to mark the entrances to both neighborhoods. Bronze plaques were erected in 1986 to announce the entrance to the local historic district.

# Rochelle Park~Rochelle Heights

**R**ochelle Park-Rochelle Heights is New Rochelle's first local historic district. It was established by the City in 1986 for the purpose of preserving the historic and architectural character of this outstanding turn-of-the-century neighborhood. The boundaries of the district are indicated on the map shown here.

Historic preservation assists with the revitalization, stabilization, and enhancement of historic neighborhoods. The creation of an historic district typically results in improved property maintenance and a heightened sense of cooperation within the neighborhood. Historic designation fosters community cohesion, identity and pride, along with an appreciation of the historic character of the community and concern for its future.



This home was recently constructed in Rochelle Heights after a fire destroyed the original historic house. It is an excellent example of using the neighborhood's Design Guidelines to create a modern but historically compatible structure that adds to the prestige of the district.

While historic buildings can be lost through outright demolition, there are more subtle ways that can erode our links with the past. The end result of minor changes and a lack of maintenance—losing one small detail at a time—can have an equally dramatic effect over time. For this reason, historic preservation techniques in the City of New Rochelle encourage the retention of the

original configuration and details of historic buildings whenever possible.

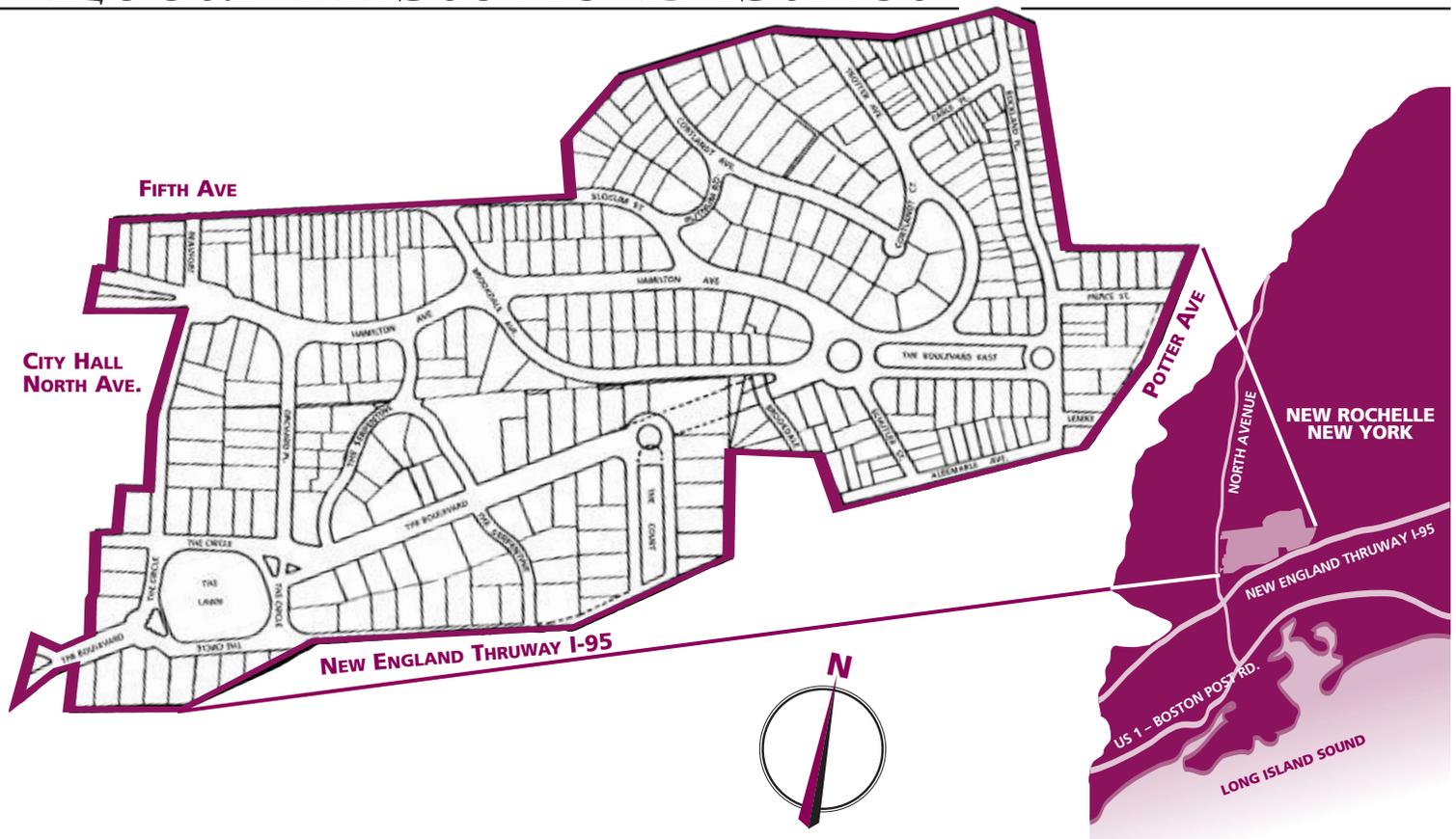
Look closely at these two photographs and you'll notice that they are the same house, minus the front porch. This is an excellent example of how the loss of one historic element alters the look of the entire structure.



## Historic District: Benefits and Responsibilities

**Benefits:** Living in a special neighborhood has its benefits. One is knowing that your neighborhood is special, and its residents have spent a significant amount of time and energy researching its architecture and history. To ensure that property owners don't make hasty, inappropriate alterations that will change the unique historic or architectural character of the neighborhood, the district is subject to certain standards. While you have to meet these standards when work is done on your property, you also benefit from knowing that all the property in the district will be treated in the same manner. Another benefit is economic. Although individual property owners do not receive direct financial rewards for maintaining and improving their property, national statistics suggest that location in an historic district can enhance the value and sales potential of a property.

# Local Historic District



**Responsibilities:** When you live in an historic district your actions can positively or negatively affect the entire neighborhood. If you think of your neighborhood as a beautiful living room, you begin to realize that if one person changes the curtains, another the wallpaper and a third buys new carpets, eventually the room won't look the way it used to look, and it could be a mess. To protect the district from this kind of alteration, New Rochelle's Historic Ordinance requires that owners obtain special approval, called a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) before certain kinds of changes are made to the exterior of your property.

## The Preservation Board and its Duties

The New Rochelle Historical and Landmarks Review Board (HLRB) is an appointed seven member volunteer body of city residents with knowledge about preservation and an interest in protecting historic neighborhoods. The Board reviews all non-maintenance exterior work proposed for properties located within the historic district. Such things as demolition, new construction, alterations, remodeling, removal of building elements, and major landscaping require a COA. Nearly every

aspect of the property and building exterior is subject to review including roofs, siding, doors and windows (including storms), porches, decks, patios, exterior painting, removing or planting trees and mature shrubs, driveways, garages, fences, etc. The HLRB reviews only those changes that are proposed by the applicant, that affect the exterior of the building or property, and that are visible from a public street. If an owner is making minor repairs with the exact same material or is repainting in exactly the same color, then no review is required. However, if an architectural feature is being replaced in its entirety, a COA is required. If property owners are not sure as to the requirements, the safest solution is to call the City and inquire. The Board issues COAs when it is satisfied that proposed work has met legislated standards.

To help answer some of your questions, the City prepared "Design Guidelines" that address what is considered appropriate in the historic district. These guidelines are used by the HLRB to review applications, and are available from the Department of Development in City Hall at 914-654-2186.

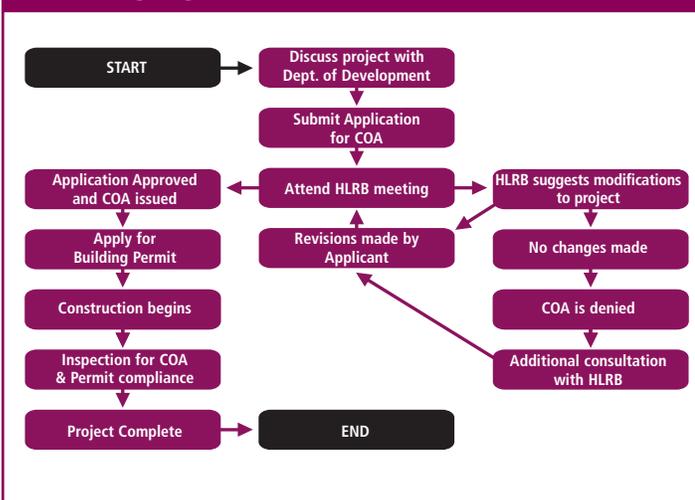
## How do I apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness?

Property owners or their agents can obtain an application for a COA from the Department of Development in City Hall. There is a minimal application fee.

If you think you might need an application, call the Department of Development to discuss your project before you order materials or begin work. Your application may require scaled drawings that show existing conditions and proposed changes. Supporting documentation, including photographs of the property and materials to be used, are necessary. A letter that notifies neighbors of the proposed work is required. City staff is available to assist you.

You or a representative must attend the HLRB meeting to discuss your proposal. Neighbors and other interested individuals are invited to comment on your proposal and Board members will ask questions. After reviewing the proposed project, the HLRB offers its opinion as to the appropriateness of the work and its conformity to the Design Guidelines. If the HLRB finds that the proposed work meets the Guidelines, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be issued and the project can proceed accordingly. An appeal procedure is available if a property owner is dissatisfied with the HLRB's decision. The flowchart shown here illustrates the typical review process.

This flowchart illustrates the process associated with securing approvals to undertake exterior rehabilitation of properties within the Rochelle Park-Rochelle Heights Local Historic District. Owners and their agents are urged to contact the Department of Development or the Building Department prior to making any commitments, ordering materials, or beginning work.



The Certificate of Appropriateness is the HLRB's official approval of an application and gives the Building Official permission to issue a Building Permit if all of

the other approvals are in place. The Building Inspector verifies that the construction work matches the approved plans. It is critical that the work is performed in accordance with the HLRB approval. Any deviations from the approved plans must be resubmitted for review. Property owners may be required to remove unapproved work.

## Can I paint my house purple?

Maybe. Paint color is regulated in the historic district. It doesn't mean you can't paint your landmark house purple, it just means you have to ask first.

## What about those flowers in the front yard?

Major landscaping changes affect the character of your property. Planting a few bulbs probably doesn't. If you can't decide, call the city and ask.



Major landscaping affects the look of this historic house. Planting or eliminating a mature tree is also significant, and requires a COA.

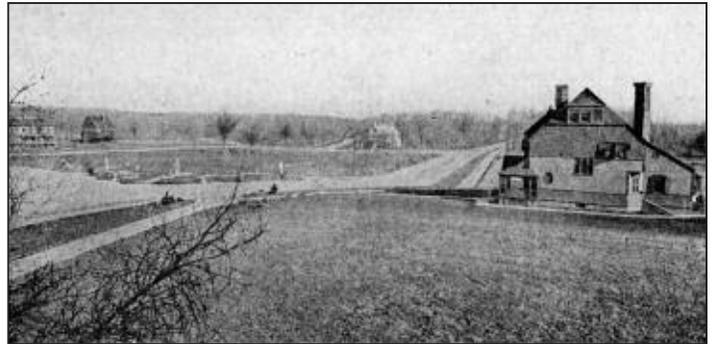
The HLRB is aware that the needs of the twenty-first century are vastly different from those of the nineteenth, when many of the buildings in the district were built. The HLRB is keenly interested in helping owners find appropriate and cost-effective ways to meet modern requirements without seriously affecting the architectural integrity of the property. Replacing documented missing features whenever possible is encouraged. The HLRB is creating a file of architectural elements that may assist you in planning your project. You are welcome to visit the Department of Development office in City Hall to review this information.

Some good advice:

Please call the New Rochelle Department of Development at 914-654-2186 with any questions before submitting your application, ordering construction materials, or starting work.

# Origins of the District

You can't help but feel as though you have stepped back in time when you stroll the tree-lined streets of the Rochelle Park and Rochelle Heights neighborhoods. Many rambling homes with Victorian detail, an abundance of public open space, and wide boulevards with expansive front lawns render a quiet atmosphere reminiscent of a bygone era. That's just what was planned for this community when it was conceived over 100 years ago.



Rochelle Park's suburban layout was established in 1885, and each home was designed and constructed as the lots were purchased. "The Lawn" looking east.

Barrett tailored the terrain with formality and aesthetic grace. Streets were carved in such a way that the neighborhood evoked a bucolic, yet manorial atmosphere. With far-sighted liberality, a total of nearly six acres was set aside for open grassy spaces suitable for outdoor gatherings. The meadow-like circle named "The Lawn" was connected to the elongated oval green of "The Court" by a wide and arbored street dubbed "The Boulevard". The neighborhood was designed as a "commuter suburb" with a diagonal orientation of The Boulevard toward the railroad station. Barrett gave curves and pleasing irregularity by snaking "The Serpentine" through the neighborhood. Stone pillars designed by English architect E.A. Sargent were erected to mark the Park's entrance.



A tree-lined street in Rochelle Heights shows the wide front lawns and large homes that were envisioned for the community over 100 years ago.

Rochelle Park had been farmland with orchards until the 1870's. Through foreclosure proceedings, the Manhattan Life Insurance Company took title to the property in 1881. Charting a brave and bold course, the company chose to transform the somewhat rugged territory into a unique residential development—unlike any other in New Rochelle. In 1885 Rochelle Park was designed by Nathan Barrett, a leading landscape architect, as America's third planned community. He laid out the site plan "to give the place a character wholly its own, to make it a park, a community, a neighborhood." It was restricted to "houses of an established standard, built on plots large enough to avoid crowding." The intent was to attract "a special class of buyer". As the railroad station was within an easy walking distance, the project was geared toward wealthy commuters seeking a quality lifestyle.



"The Lawn" today, looking south.

Barrett took great pains to give each prospective home a view unobstructed by the one next door. Mr. Barrett created a plan with a long look toward the future.



A long view down “The Boulevard” in Rochelle Park, showing the wide front lawns unencumbered by fences and gates.

Immediately adjacent to Rochelle Park, the Rochelle Heights neighborhood was laid out in 1905 and 1907 by three architects—Horace Mann, Perry MacNeille and Harrie Lindeberg—by following Barrett’s design principals. Like Rochelle Park, the neighborhood was designed as a “commuter suburb” with its orientation toward the railroad station on North Avenue, and toward the trolley on Fifth Avenue. Rochelle Heights was also designed with wide and winding boulevards, open green spaces, spacious front lawns with 50 foot setbacks, and entrance pillars.

The neighborhoods contain more than 275 examples of residential architecture that were popular from the 1890’s through the 1920’s.



Various styles of historic architecture found in Rochelle Park and Rochelle Heights.

Rochelle Park and Rochelle Heights were planned with carefully delineated boundaries, and the layouts of the neighborhoods have remained virtually unchanged as when they were designed 100 years ago. Today the boundaries of the two neighborhoods are indiscernible, and together they form the city’s first local historic district.

Rochelle Park and Rochelle Heights served as prototypes for the type of residential park development that took place in New Rochelle in the decades that followed. It is these “parks” that give New Rochelle its unique residential ambience. These neighborhoods set the tone for an important element in the modern development of New Rochelle, and thus have a special historic value.

**City of New Rochelle, New York**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT CITY OF NEW ROCHELLE HLRB • 914-479-9515**