

An Introduction to the Schenley Farms Historic District

This article will focus on the standards for living in the Schenley Farms Historic District and the ongoing work by the Schenley Farms Civic Association (SFCA) to maintain the neighborhood as an upscale, single family community. Whether you are considering a move to Schenley Farms, new to the area or a long time resident, the SFCA Board's goal is to provide information that will help preserve our neighborhood.

The Schenley Farms Historic District is largely the design of developer F.F Nicola, who in 1905 conceived of a "model city" on an open tract of land in the Oakland area of Pittsburgh. Nicola envisioned a fine residential enclave adjoining a monumental civic complex, a combination of model suburb and City Beautiful. The Schenley Farms Historic District became the residential portion of Nicola's Civic Center Plan. The neighborhood is a museum of early twentieth Century Domestic Architecture, and was designated as an historic district in 1978.

The neighborhood was developed by the Schenley Farms Corporation who established the building restrictions and provided for the care of trees, sidewalks, vacant properties and general maintenance of Schenley Farms. By 1920, the development of Schenley Farms was complete and the neighborhood established a permanent organization for the purpose of "...the promotion of all matters pertaining to the general welfare and interest of the Farms." On December 13th of 1920 the Constitution and By-Laws of the Schenley Farms Civic Association (SFCA) were adopted. Its purpose was twofold:

- The extension of restrictions on the use of the lands in the Schenley Farms district as established by the Schenley Farms Company.
- Care and maintenance of the district "in such a manner as to insure its continuance as a high class residence district. "

The SFCA remains dedicated to the preservation of the character and quality of urban living envisioned by F.F. Nicola. If you have any questions for the SFCA, please contact the board at schenleyfarms@gmail.com. More information on the history of Schenley Farms and news about the neighborhood can be found at www.schenleyfarms.org. A map of the Schenley Farms Historic District is on the last page of this article.



Schenley Farms Historic District Responsibilities

Home ownership in Schenley Farms brings with it responsibilities to insure that the neighborhood will remain a quiet, upscale residential neighborhood. Adhering to those responsibilities creates a continuity with the past and preserves the neighborhood into the future. The responsibilities include zoning, tree maintenance, underground utility services and historic district compliance. All of these responsibilities will be briefly outlined. If you have any questions, please contact the SFCA.

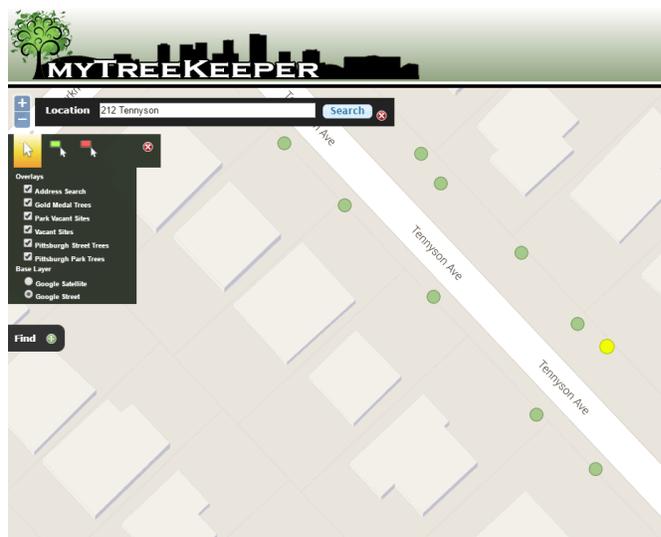
Zoning

The Schenley Farms Historic District is zoned detached residential, single family, very low density. That means that a either single family may live in a home, or up to three unrelated adults. The homeowners in the neighborhood have a responsibility to maintain those standards. In the event that the SFCA learns that the occupancy rules are not being followed, the SFCA will insist on zoning enforcement by the city. The SFCA's intent is to preserve Schenley Farms as a single family residential neighborhood.

The zoning code establishes a 30' minimum setback from the street, maximum height of 40' and minimum lot size of 8000' in the neighborhood. Based on those numbers it would be impossible for someone to buy a house and subdivide the lot to create a second home. The zoning ordinances are designed to provide consistency in the neighborhood.

Trees

The Schenley Farms Historic District was developed with tree lined vistas. Many of those trees are owned by the city of Pittsburgh and are commonly known as "city trees". They are usually in the front yard near the sidewalk. The easiest way to check to see if it is a city tree is to go to pittsburgh.mytreekeeper.com and enter the address.



If you have a city tree, it will show up as a green or yellow dot on the map. It is your responsibility to let the city forestry division know if it needs pruning or has any issues. The residents are not authorized to do work on the city trees. The forestry division can be contacted by calling 412-665-3625.

Trees on your property that are not included in the mytreekeeper database are the homeowner's responsibility.

Underground Utilities

Since inception, Schenley Farms has had underground utilities. There are no above ground power lines in the neighborhood. This is one of the many unique features of Schenley Farms. Over the years, phone, cable TV, and internet lines have been installed and maintained in the same manner. Power lines to detached garages are underground as well. Homeowners are expected to maintain the standard of underground lines and allow utility companies access to conduits that may be in their yard when maintenance is required.

Historic District Designation

The neighborhood of Schenley Farms is designated as a historic district. As a homeowner that means that any work done on the outside of the house that can be seen from the street is expected to be appropriate for the home. No alteration can be made to the exterior without review and approval of the Historic Review Commission (HRC). There is no HRC oversight on changes to the interior of the home. The HRC meets monthly to review [Applications for A Certificate or Appropriateness](#). Details on the HRC process can be found at the Historic Review Commission website: <http://pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/historic-review-commission>.

Let's look at an example of what the process might look like. If someone wanted to replace the two wooden windows that follow, the expectation is that an application to the HRC would be made. Pictures of the existing window and the planned replacement window would be submitted and reviewed by the HRC.



Original wooden windows with storm windows from the 60s



Potential Replacement Windows

The window on the left is much more energy efficient than the original windows. The HRC would probably reject that window as inappropriate for the house. The window on the right is both energy efficient and appropriate. It would probably be approved by the HRC. The value in being in a historic district is the consistent nature and character of its homes. Maintaining the nature and character of the great homes in Schenley Farms is a responsibility shared by all homeowners in the neighborhood. A general description of how being in a historic district affects a property follows on the next page.

Life in Schenley Farms

Schenley Farms is a lovely neighborhood. It was well planned and maintained for the first century of its existence. The SFCA is committed to preserving that heritage into the future. We have partnered with Pitt, CMU and UPMC to maintain a residential neighborhood just blocks from these institutions. If you have any questions about the neighborhood or need more information about zoning, tree service, underground utilities or working with the HRC, please contact the SFCA at schenleyfarms@gmail.com.



How does being in a Historic District affect a property?

This information is general in nature and not intended to be a substitute for legal advice. The City of Pittsburgh ordinance which authorizes the Historic Review Commission and sets out all the requirements for nomination and the requirements once a property is designated as Historic can be found in the Code of Ordinances for the city of Pittsburgh at Chapter 1101: “Historic Structures Districts and Districts.”

According to the ordinance controlling historic designation, once a property is designated as Historic, no alteration can be made to the exterior, visible to the street, without review and approval of the Historic Review Commission.

No Exterior Alterations as defined in § 1101.02(e) or change of location of an Historic Object, shall be undertaken upon a Historic Structure or upon a structure located within a Historic District or upon a Historic Site or upon a Historic Object without the review of the Historic Review Commission or the authorized approval of certain routine kinds of exterior work specified by the Commission without the formal review and approval of the Commission itself, and issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Where there has been a historic designation, approval for alterations may be granted if the inability to do so would be a hardship as defined by the ordinance.

Any applicant denied a Certificate of Appropriateness by the Commission may within thirty (30) days make application for a Certificate of Economic Hardship on a form prepared by the Commission and submitted to the Commission.

A historic designation under Pittsburgh’s Ordinance does not control interior changes so that no review or approval is needed. Other zoning laws and building code requirements may apply. Similarly, historic designation under Federal law does not cover interior changes to residential property.

Historic Designation offers special protection for property owners.

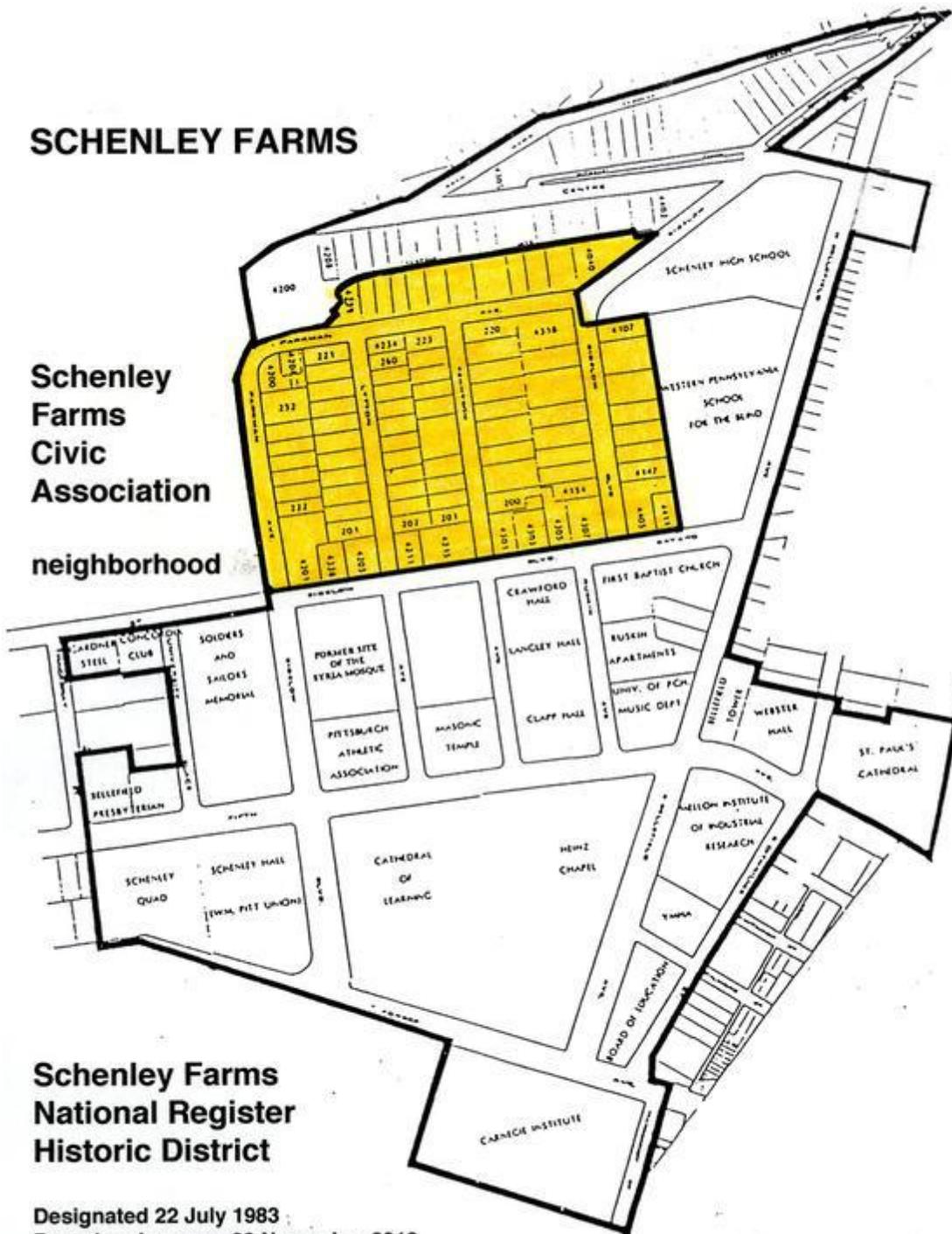
In general, in a historic District, homeowners are protected in several ways. Properties in an historic neighborhood cannot be torn down easily so that the neighborhood integrity will be preserved. Property owners must maintain the exteriors of properties and may not make exterior physical changes that are inconsistent with the existing building and neighborhood unless that would create a special hardship on the owner.

<p>This is not intended to be legal advice. Consult an attorney familiar with land use and historic designation laws.</p>
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Schenley Farms Historic District Map

SCHENLEY FARMS

Schenley Farms
Civic
Association
neighborhood



Schenley Farms
National Register
Historic District

Designated 22 July 1983
Boundary Increase 28 November 2012
(expanded to include Bellefield Dwellings)

