



FAQ: WA's Historic Landmarking Bill

What does [HB 1576/SB 5554](#) do?

It requires (1) that local governments get consent from the owner of a property before designating it a historic landmark and (2) that a property must be at least 40 years old to be designated.

What is historic landmark status?

It's a local designation that severely restricts any alterations to or demolition of a property. Typically, anyone can nominate a property, and then a special commission must approve it.

How old do properties have to be?

The norm in Washington cities is 40 or 50 years, with the exception of Seattle, where the minimum age is only 25 years.

How many Washington towns and cities would this change affect?

Only about one-quarter of the state's larger cities and towns. That's because the remaining [three-quarters](#) of them already require owner consent for historic landmarking. HB 1576/SB 5554 is consistent with what most cities are already doing. For points of reference, owner consent for landmarking is required by [Oregon state law](#) and by the [National Historic Preservation Act](#).

How does historic landmarking impact housing supply?

In most cases, landmarking a property prevents it from being redeveloped into housing. In growing Washington cities, residents unhappy about change can co-opt landmarking to obstruct new homebuilding. In 2017, [Sightline identified](#) hundreds of obstructed housing units in Seattle alone. Just last month, Historic Seattle nominated a structurally obsolete apartment building owned by YWCA, which will halt YWCA's plans to redevelop it into [83 new homes](#).

How does landmarking jeopardize the legislature's housing progress?

Cities are currently implementing 2023's [HB 1110](#), which legalized important middle housing options statewide. Landmarking without consent especially threatens this modest scale of homebuilding. For small builders with limited financial resources, just the possibility that a house on a redevelopment site could be landmarked is enough to turn them away. It only takes one resident who doesn't like middle housing to nominate a house.

Who opposes this historic landmarking bill?

The Washington Trust for Historic Preservation is [organizing opposition](#), claiming that "the bill solves a problem that does not exist." If, as they claim, landmarking houses without owner consent is vanishingly rare, then why should the Trust oppose it?

How do we ensure we still protect places of historic value?

The same way most cities and towns in Washington already do: with the bill's commonsense requirement that an owner approve the designation of their property as historic, plus a very generous age minimum (considering that most people would find it offensive to be called "historic" at age 40).