

I am the chair of the Community Preservation Panel (CPP) in Aurora, NY. Thank you for your questions; I am happy to attempt to answer them.

When the Community Preservation Panel (CPP) was formed it was given the responsibility to ensure the integrity of the historic structures in the village. Initially village officials felt the CPP should have oversight over the entire village of Aurora. This oversight continued since the inception of the zoning law in the 1970's, and at times was somewhat cumbersome when dealing with new development outside the long-established areas or neighborhoods of Aurora. This past year the village rewrote and updated the Zoning Law. As a result, the CPP is now able to focus on areas of the village that are designated historic.

You may be aware that most of Main Street and the Wells College campus has been part of an established historic district. Additionally, several structures and landmarks outside this area have been designated as "Historic Landmarks." With the change in the Zoning Law, however, Court Street and Cherry Avenue fell outside the originally designated Historic District.

The CPP was asked to consider recommending to the Village Board that Court Street/Cherry Avenue become a historic district. This neighborhood shows the evolution of the economic, cultural, and social history of the village. It provided familial and social cohesion among the working families of Aurora who made possible the growth and development of the village. In other words the Court Street/Cherry Avenue neighborhood is the neighborhood of the families who played a critical role in the development of the village, the Maloneys, the Murphys, the Shimers, the Polhamuses, the Fitzgeralds to name a few.

Additionally, many of the houses in this neighborhood were houses that were moved from Main Street [to make room for larger mansions] or were carriage houses/barns converted to homes. And while not the "glamorous" and large mansions of Main Street, they are important in and of themselves. For example, the house at 48 Cherry Avenue was moved from Main Street. It was the place in which the first Catholic Mass was said in the village.

So to protect the integrity of the Court Street/Cherry Avenue neighborhood the CPP has moved to recommend that it be added to the Historic District. What does this mean? It means that nothing has changed for Court Street and Cherry Avenue. The process which existed under the old Zoning Law will continue for the Court Street/Cherry Avenue historic district, which means that before anything can be changed the CPP will review the proposed changes to ensure that the integrity of the neighborhood is preserved. It will prevent developers from coming in, demolishing existing homes, and building new, upscale homes in their place.

What it means for you, however, is very little. You will continue to be able to maintain your home as you have in the past, including changing colors of the paint applied to your home. CPP does ask if you want to build an addition on the house, change materials as you maintain your home, or add outbuildings to your property that you run it by the Panel. For example, if you would want to change your roof from asphalt shingles to a metal roof, we ask that you bring that to the Panel. Also, demolition of any parts of the house or outbuilding will need to be reviewed by the CPP.

We, as you, don't want someone doing something to their home that will compromise the feeling of the neighborhood and impact its integrity. Interior changes are beyond the scope of the CPP.

Being a historic district does not affect the assessment value of your home. Your taxes will not be impacted by the designation.

I hope this explanation has helped you understand the context of the move to make Court Street/Cherry Avenue a historic district as well as what has changed to precipitate the action. I also hope you will be comfortable with what the designation means. No one wants the designation to be a burden or to be onerous to the homeowners. CPP wants to protect the owner's interest in their home and their neighborhood.

If you have further questions or comments, I will be happy to continue this conversation. Again, thank you for your inquiry and questions.

Sincerely

Jim Burkett