



# SECTION 10

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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# HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## INTRODUCTION

Gretna's history is reflected in the City's old buildings, historic districts, and local community that takes pride in its rich heritage. The preservation of their valuable resources is essential to protecting Gretna's cultural identity, and a primary economic driver. Maintenance of historic sites and the preservation of historic neighborhood character strengthens the City's distinct identity, promotes its rich history, fosters community cohesion, and encourages attractive development. This element documents existing historic resources and presents a strategy to strengthen local historic preservation efforts and enable long-term preservation of Gretna's historic heritage.

The City of Gretna currently has four historic landmarks and one historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Further, the City designated two local historic districts, Old-Gretna and McDonoghville, which are regulated by the City's historic preservation ordinance. A State of Louisiana Cultural District designation covers Old Gretna, McDonoghville, and a connecting corridor around 5th Street.

## NATIONALLY REGISTERED HISTORIC PLACES

While being listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the US Department of the Interior is an honor and provides public exposure, the designation's actual impact on preservation is limited. The private owner of a historic landmark or structure located within the boundaries of an historic district may modify or even demolish the listed property as they wish. Thus, for the preservation of historic heritage, local regulations are far more effective. However, Gretna is currently the location of four nationally recognized historic landmarks and the Old Gretna National Historic District. To strengthen the recognition of McDonoghville's historic fabric, the City of Gretna should push to nominate the Neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places.

## 1. OLD GRETNA HISTORIC DISTRICT

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Old Gretna was designated a historic district under the National Historic Preservation Act in 1985. District limits are approximately defined by Dolhonde Street to the west, 1st Street to the north, Amelia Avenue to the east, and 9th Street to the south. In the southeast, the district extends one block further to 10th Street. See [Figure 10.1: Gretna's Historic Districts](#). The district is located in the Old Gretna-Mechanickham neighborhood adjacent to the Mississippi River and contains 53 blocks and 737 structures. While the district consists primarily of residential uses, a commercial sector is located near the River. With 75% of structures built before 1935, the Gretna Historic District is the architecturally richest and most impressive cluster of historic structures in Jefferson Parish. The district accommodates a large variety of building types including Italianate, Eastlake, and Creole residences, and its character is highly representative of comparable sized towns of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Approximately 75% of the district's built environment originated between 1845 and 1935, with a 25% intrusion rate. The Gretna Historic District is located near a significant collection of architectural landmarks of which three are separately listed as Historic Landmarks in the National Register of Historic Places as described below (*LA State Historic Preservation Office*).

## 2. HISTORIC LANDMARKS

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### A. Jefferson Parish Court House (listed in 1983)

The former Jefferson Parish Courthouse, which today serves as Gretna's City Hall, is located on 740 2nd Street in Downtown Gretna. The structure was designed by New Orleans based architect R. S. Soule in a renaissance style, featuring a Baroque-style two-story courtroom on the second floor. It was built in 1907 and in 1929 expanded with an annex in the rear. It served as the Parish Courthouse until 1956 and has been leased to the City of Gretna since 1961. Currently it accommodates City Hall in the main building and the sheriff's department in the rear annex. Even though the building was repeatedly renovated over the years, its architectural integrity was retained.

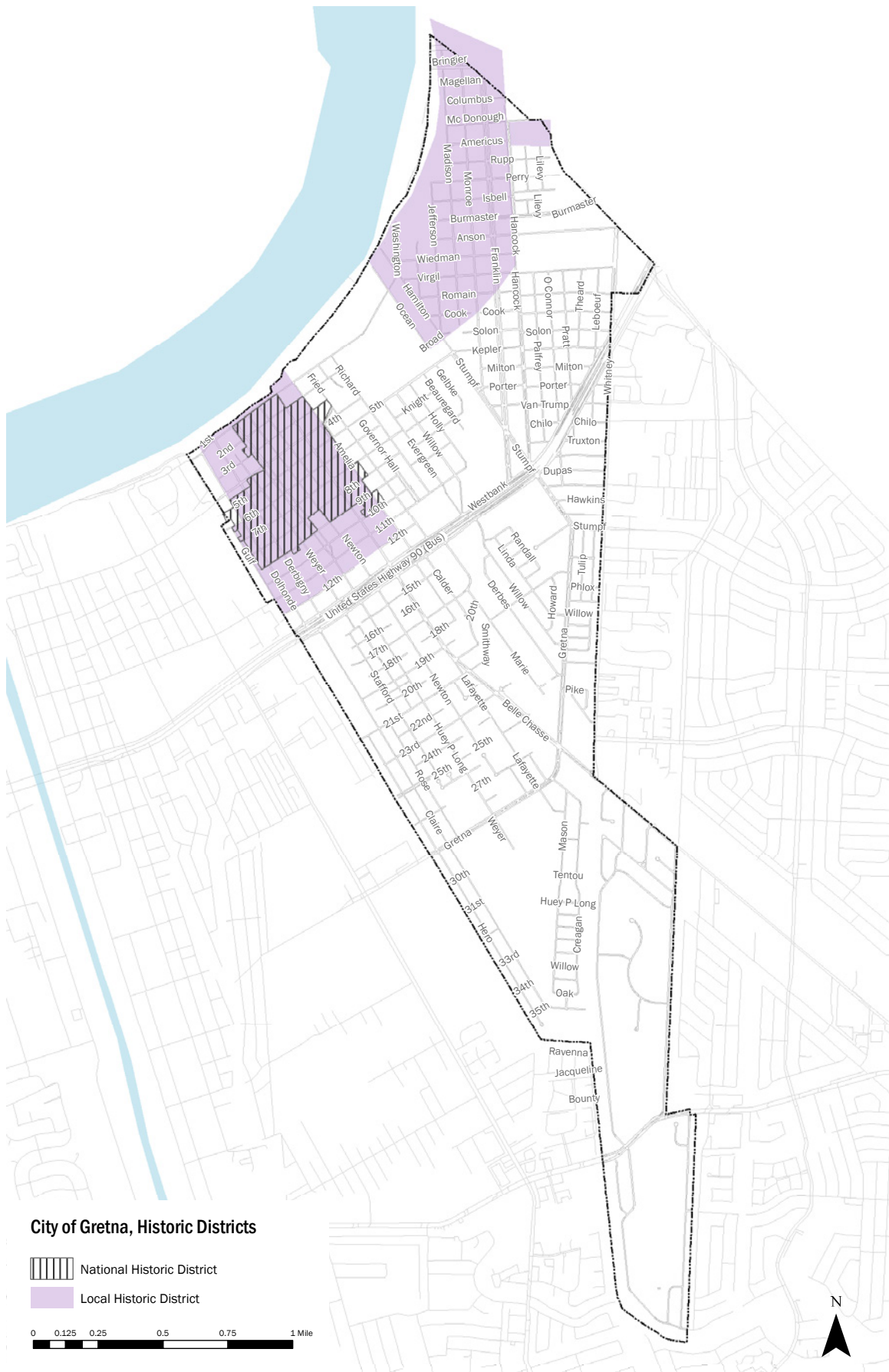


Figure 10.1: Gretna's Historic Districts





Figure 10.2: Gretna City Hall

### ***B. St. Joseph Church - Convent of the Most Holy Sacrament Complex (listed in 1983)***

The building complex at 610 6th Street consists of St. Joseph Church and the Convent of the Most Holy Sacrament, which includes a boarding school. Construction of the three-story brick building, accommodating the convent and boarding school, began in 1899. In 1907 a wing was added to the building for a chapel. St. Joseph Church was built in 1926 in a Spanish Colonial Revival style, replacing the previous church, located on the same site. In 1940 an additional school building was added, which was considered a non-contributing element when the site was listed in 1983. According to the Louisiana State Review Committee for the National Register, the complex represents Gretna's most prestigious architectural grouping.



Figure 10.3: St. Joseph Church

### ***C. David Crockett Fire Company Gould #31 Pumper (listed in 1983)***

Located at 205 Lafayette Street, the David Crockett Fire Company was built in 1859 as a two-story frame structure, accommodating a stall for the pumper in the first floor and a meeting hall upstairs. The historic pumper was manufactured in 1876 by the R. Gould Company in Newark, New Jersey. While most historic pumpers were moved into museums, the David Crockett pumper is still located in the Crockett's Fire Hall in its original setting. The company is one of the oldest continuously active volunteer fire companies in the Nation.



Figure 10.4: David Crockett Fire Station

## **LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

While the National Register does not impose any preservation regulations on listed properties and districts, the locally designated Historic Districts Mechanickham-Gretna, McDonoghville, and the McDonoghville Cemetery are subject to the City's Historic Preservation Regulations (City of Gretna Code of Ordinances, Chapter 32 Historic Preservation). To ensure the preservation of the integrity of the City's historic heritage, proposals for exterior alterations and demolition are reviewed by the Gretna Historic District Commission before a permit is issued.

### ***1. MECHANICKHAM-GRETNA HISTORIC DISTRICT***

The Mechanickham-Gretna Historic District was designated by the City in 1997. It is bounded by Gulf Drive and Dolhonde Street to the West, the Mississippi River to the North, Amelia Street to the East, and 12th Street to the South. The local Historic District

encompasses almost the entire National Historic District and additionally covers the institutional cluster in Downtown Gretna and two additional streets to the South. See [Figure 10.1: Gretna's Historic Districts](#).

## **2. MCDONOGHVILLE AND MCDONOGHVILLE CEMETERY HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

The McDonoghville Historic District was designated in 2005 and is bound on the west by the Mississippi River, southwest by Ocean Street, southeast by the former railroad corridor and future 4th Street Extension, to the east by Hancock Street, and to the north by Gretna city limits. See [Figure 10.1: Gretna's Historic Districts](#). While McDonoghville's historic fabric is less dense and cohesive than that of Old Gretna, it nevertheless features a remarkable number of historically significant structures, representing Italianate, Eastlake, and Creole architectural styles, including the Kerner House, which was listed a National Historic Landmark in 2000 (*LA State Historic Preservation Office*). Established in 1815, more than two decades before Mechanickham (1836) and Gretna (1838), McDonoghville was Gretna's first subdivision. Named after philanthropic Greater New Orleans area resident John McDonogh, the settlement, which originated as a farming community, consists of primarily residential uses (*City of Gretna and Clio Associates, 2014*). The McDonoghville Cemetery is also designated as a local Historic District and falls thus under the jurisdiction of the Gretna Historic District Commission. More on Gretna's and McDonoghville's historic community development can be found in [Element 7: Community Design](#). By adding the McDonoghville neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places, the neighborhood would gain recognition and would also qualify for tax credits for historically-appropriate renovations and restoration.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION REGULATIONS & GUIDELINES**

With the designation of the Mechanickham-Gretna Historic District in 1997, the City of Gretna established Historic Preservation Regulations (City of Gretna Code of Ordinances Chapter 32 Historic Preservation) and appointed the Historic District Commission (HDC), consisting of seven members, including one architect and one historian. The jurisdiction of the regulations includes the two locally designated Historic Districts as well as the McDonoghville Cemetery, and those parts of the National Historic District which are not otherwise covered.

The regulations regard the exterior architectural features and their relationship to other structures within the districts only. The interior of structures is not regulated, and also does not include non-structural features like planting. Structures being added or changed are subject to review by the HDC, as well as all proposed signs, fences, and encroachments. Further, demolition by neglect within district boundaries is prohibited. If the proposed structure or alteration is in compliance with the Historic District requirements, the HDC issues a Certificate of Appropriateness. The essential criteria for the HDC decision is a proposed structure or alteration's compatibility in terms of size, texture, scale, and site plan with historic structures in the District. Signs are further regulated and limited to one sign per business. The HDC also recommends the approval or denial of applications for demolition of structures. In the case of a tied or majority negative HDC vote, the case is brought to the City Council which makes the final decision and can overturn the recommendation of the HDC at its discretion. Other than cost considerations for possible restoration, criteria considered under demolition applications include the historic significance of the building, its contribution to the historic character of the district, difficulty or impossibility of reproducing such a building, and the future utilization of the site.

While the preservation of Gretna's heritage is important, the cost of maintaining historic structures should not force low income property owners to sell their property. Regulations should account for the socioeconomic diversity within the Historic Districts of Gretna, and support should be provided to low-income owners for rehabilitation of historic properties.

The City of Gretna, working with the HDC, has compiled the Historic District Design Guidelines, which is a manual available for download on the City of Gretna website. The document provides detailed information on design standards and presents examples of desired and unwanted development details. All presented examples aim to copy historic styles and do not provide guidance on incorporating contemporary design in historic areas. Such development should be an option within the Historic Districts.

As the HDC has review authority only on structural elements, there are no specific regulations on plantings and buffers in place to ensure the integrity of the historic character of the place and landscape. A design overlay district for the historic neighborhoods should be established in the City's new zoning regulations to ensure that future development meets the design standards in

keeping with the character of the neighborhoods and maintaining them as a cohesive place.

## **GREтна CULTURAL DISTRICT**

The Louisiana Cultural Districts Program, an initiative led by the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, was created in 2007 with the primary goal of supporting local community revitalization by offering tax incentives for cultural activities. The City of Gretna Cultural District was designated in 2008 and comprises parts of Old Gretna-Mechanickham, McDonoghville, and a connecting corridor. See *Figure 10.6: Gretna's Cultural District*. The certification as a Louisiana Cultural District allows a waiver of sales tax on transactions of original, handcrafted artwork to support local cultural activity, and provides tax credits for eligible expenses for rehabilitation of owner-occupied or revenue-generating historic structures within the Cultural District boundaries. While the Division of Historic Preservation determines eligibility for the tax credit program on a case to case basis, generally all buildings of fifty years or older within district boundaries may be eligible. As a large share of the housing stock in the Old Garden Park neighborhood is reaching this age threshold, the City of Gretna could amend the district boundaries to include that neighborhood and support the restoration of historic structures there.







## GOALS

### **Goal 1: Strengthen the integrity of preservation in the City's historic neighborhoods.**

#### **Objective 1.1:**

*Establish a design overlay district for the City's Historic Districts in the new Zoning Regulations to preserve the overall integrity of the historic character of the neighborhoods.*

#### **Objective 1.2:**

*Add the McDonoghville neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places.*

### **Goal 2: Incentivize historic preservation while maintaining housing affordability within the historic districts.**

#### **Objective 2.1:**

*Amend the Cultural District boundaries to include the Old Garden Park Neighborhood to make historic structures eligible for receiving State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits.*

#### **Objective 2.2:**

*Enable alternative housing types for infill in historic districts that provide affordable housing choices.*

### **Goal 3: Ensure the synchronization of historic preservation goals with economic development goals.**

#### **Objective 3.1:**

*Utilize Gretna's history and unique cultural heritage to promote local businesses and tourism.*

#### **Objective 3.2:**

*Strengthen knowledge and awareness of Gretna's historic resources to foster community identity and pride and attract visitors.*

#### **Objective 3.3:**

*Reestablish the Gretna Ferry line to provide convenient access to the City for commuters and for visitors coming from New Orleans.*

#### **Objective 3.4:**

*Continue local events that support businesses within the City's Historic Districts.*

#### **Objective 3.5:**

*Find ways of showcasing and celebrating McDonoghville's unique heritage.*

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