

Notes from South Capitol Neighborhood Association Board Meeting

Weds, May 13, 2026
Lincoln Elementary School library

Discussion with Olympia Heritage Commission on potential benefits of listing the South Capitol Neighborhood Association (SCNA) as a city-recognized historic district

Attendees:

Brittany Gillia, associate planner/historic preservation officer in the City of Olympia's Community Planning and Economic Development Department, Bill Cotter, [the Olympia Heritage Commission's](#) incoming chair, Derek Foster and Kyle Kimball, commission members.

SCNA Board Members: Gerry Apple, Sue Hedrick, Valerie Hammett, Blake Melancon, Morgan Montes, Eric Seder

In April, Brittany reached out to John Saunders, president of the SCNA board, to ask if the board was interested in discussing whether the South Capitol Neighborhood would be interested in pursuing designation by the City of Olympia as a local historic district.

Brittany explained that the reason they were wanting to meet about this is that the [Washington State Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation](#) (DAHP) had informed the city that locally designated historic districts may have better protections than those with only historic designation on the National Register of Historic Places. *

Two historic districts – the South Capitol Neighborhood and the Downtown Neighborhood – are on the National Register of Historic Places. However, this is only an honorary designation, so being listed on it doesn't grant protections. In other words, it does not result in any restrictions or design review on private property owners in historic districts.

Brittany said they were hoping to discuss what may be the advantages or disadvantages of becoming a locally designated historic district. Then the board members could decide if there was interest in pursuing that, and what further steps would need to be taken.

The reason for considering doing this now is that the state is asking the city to move forward with updating its municipal regulations to comply with state law. Registering locally would allow Brittany to continue to do the design review work she's been doing.

Not all local governments in the state have [design review](#) and [historic preservation](#) written in their code. Olympia has had this for some time. If the city doesn't adopt and follow a separate and distinct local designation and regulation process by becoming a certified local government (CLG), it could lose these regulatory protections.

The Certified Local Government Program (CLG) helps local governments preserve Washington's historic and cultural resources as assets for the future. This unique nationwide program of financial and technical assistance was established by the National Historic Preservation Act. In Washington, the CLG program is implemented and administered by the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

CLGs in Washington State are required to maintain a qualified historic preservation commission, adopt a local ordinance that gives the local Historic Preservation Commission the means to establish a local register of historic places and to review changes to buildings listed on the local register or in a local register district, a process known as Design Review.

Brittany said this is something the city of Olympia already does but is at risk of losing the ability to apply design review unless they become a Certified Local Government.

Brittany said she was not sure how long the city would be able to delay coming into compliance with state law, which could potentially result in a gap in coverage for regulating historic preservation requirements. The state wants this to be changed as soon as possible, but no specific date has been set.

[CLG Application Process](#)

The Certified Local Government Application Process has four steps:

- The first step would be to adopt a historic preservation ordinance. Since Olympia already has a historic preservation ordinance, it would need to be updated. **
- The second step would be to form a Historic Preservation Commission, if not already formed concurrently with the ordinance. Olympia already has the Olympia Heritage Commission.***
- The third step would be for the commission to work through the Bylaws and Rules of Procedure established for the Commission and administration of the program.
- And the fourth step would be to apply for Certified Local Government status.

Brittany said there is also an opportunity to [apply for a CLG grant](#) to hire a professional to conduct an architectural survey – an inventory of all homes in a historic neighborhood. A survey of historic property in Olympia was last completed in 1991.

If our neighborhood association was in support of this, the Olympia Heritage Commission would apply for the grant and the SCNA could assist in this process. The grant application is due by June 30, 2026.

The SCNA board members at the meeting supported the Heritage Commission applying for the grant to have a survey of properties in the South Capitol Neighborhood done.

Brittany said that one of the [benefits of becoming a locally designated historic district](#) in the CLG Program is that design standards could go above and beyond what is currently in place. But, like state

and national Registers, in most CLG communities, consent from a majority of the property owners would be required for listing in the local register.

She added that, on Mon, June 8, 2026, the Olympia Heritage Commission will hold a training with historic preservationists from local Certified Local Governments (CLGs). One or two members of the South Capitol Neighborhood Association are welcome to attend.

*In 1991, with the help of volunteers from the SCNA, the Olympia Heritage Commission succeeded in placing the South Capitol Neighborhood Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. With more than 440 properties, it is one of the largest residential historic districts in the state.

**There was no official preservation program in Olympia until a municipal Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted by City Council in 1983. The Historic Preservation Program (Olympia Municipal Code 18.12) was designed to build support for preservation by acknowledging local historic sites, providing guidance to property owners and educating the public through interpretive markers and special events. It outlined a preservation program with three primary components:

***The Olympia Heritage Commission

Nine members, of which a majority must reside in Olympia or Olympia's Urban Growth Area. Must include at least four professionals from fields such as architecture, historic preservation, anthropology, history and law who have experience in identifying, evaluating and protecting historic places. The members serve three-year terms and are appointed by the Olympia City Council.