

Environmental Review: Frequently Asked Questions

What triggers environmental review?

Each year, thousands of projects affect historic properties in Georgia. Many projects are initiated by, paid for by, or require permits or licenses from, government agencies. Both state and federal statutes require the agency or applicant responsible for the project to consult with the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) in order to take into account the effects the project may have on Georgia's cultural resources.

What is HPDs role in environmental review?

HPDs role is to assist federal agencies in complying with Section 106 and Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act and state agencies in complying with Georgia Environmental Policy Act (GEPA) and State Agency Historic Property Stewardship Program. The Environmental Review process provides the planning framework that requires federal and state agencies to take into account the effects of their projects and actions on historic structural and archaeological resources that are eligible for or listed in the Georgia/National Register of Historic Places.

What is a historic property?

Under federal law, an historic property is any district, site, building, structure, or object that meets the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is a list established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, to recognize properties for their significance in history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture. Under state law, a historic property is any district, site, building, structure, or object eligible for listing in the Georgia Register of Historic Places. The criteria are the same as those used for the National Register.

You may find it helpful to check GNAHRGIS, Georgia's web-based geographical information system that has information about the state's archaeological and historic resources. Information about archaeological sites in GNAHRGIS is restricted but staff at the Georgia Archaeological Site File (GASF), which is administered by the University of Georgia, will conduct database research for a fee. Visit our archaeology website for contact information regarding the GASF. Please note that not all areas of the state have been surveyed for historic properties; therefore, GNAHRGIS is not all-encompassing.

What documentation does HPD need to complete review of projects?

For the majority of projects, HPD requests that applicants use our Environmental Review (ER) Form when submitting projects for review. The ER Form can be found in a PDF or Word version on the main Review and Compliance page of our website. Please fill out the form completely and mail it, along with the required supporting materials (maps, photos, project plans, etc.) to the address at the bottom of the form. By completing the form to the greatest extent possible and including the required supporting material, a prolonged review process is less likely since HPD should not need to request additional information. Please note, HPD is unable to accept emailed or faxed submittals at this time. For communication tower projects, please see the Communication Tower portion of our website under Review and Compliance for details and guidelines as to research required and submittal requirements.

Does HPD accept email or facsimile submittals?

HPD is unable to accept email or facsimile submittals at this point due to attachment size limits and printing costs. Please mail submittals to the address noted on the ER Form or on our website.

What is HPD's expected response time?

HPD has a 30-day review period from the date of submittal receipt. If it has been more than 30 days since your project was submitted, make sure to check your spam or junk folders, as our responses come via email from an unmanned email address. If you have not received a response, please contact the respective environmental review historian with details of your project including the address or associated street names, city, and county. Delays in mailing can be avoided by using delivery services like FedEx or UPS, which deliver directly to our office. Additionally, if more information is requested by HPD, the 30-day review period starts over once the additional information is received.

Is HPD able to expedite reviews?

With HPDs limited staff and the hundreds of reviews submitted in a month, we are unfortunately unable to expedite reviews.

What happens if my project is determined to have an adverse effect or significant impact?

When an adverse effect or significant impact is found, this means that additional documentation and steps in the process are needed in order for the project to proceed. By law, agencies should try to avoid, minimize or mitigate the negative effects. To do so, HPD will first ask for documentation showing that an attempt has been made to avoid or minimize the effect. For example, if the project involves demolition of a historic structure, was rehabilitation discussed and why was it ruled out? If options were not discussed that could avoid or minimize the adverse effect, then HPD will ask that these options be explored. Once the correct documentation has been provided to demonstrate such options and discussions, and the options are not feasible, then mitigation becomes the only remaining option. This step involves the applicant drafting a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and all parties involved agreeing upon mitigation stipulations. The draft is then circulated for comments, and a final MOA is prepared for signature. Once the MOA is executed, the project may proceed. However, the MOA stipulations must be fulfilled within the timeline specified in the agreement in order for the process to be considered complete.