

HERITAGE HINTS FOR HOUSEHOLDERS

The National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) seeks to “...empower civil society to nurture and conserve their heritage resources so that they may be bequeathed to future generations”. This document is issued in the interests of heritage conservation.

Property owners should realise that certain obligations arise if their property is 60 years old or older, or when the property becomes 60 years old – this in terms of the so-called “sixty-year rule”

What is the “sixty-year” rule?

In terms of the NHRA, Sec. 34 (1), “No person may alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years without a permit issued by the relevant provincial Heritage Resources Authority”. In Gauteng, this body is the Provincial Heritage Resources Authority (Gauteng), or PHRAG. Contact details are available from the Ward Councillor.

It should be noted that not all properties 60 years old or older, although they are protected in terms of the Act, are heritage properties. When contemplating alterations, each property will be assessed, and treated on merit.

What is meant by “alter”?

The NHRA defines alter as follows: “... any action affecting the structure, appearance or physical properties of a place or object, whether by way of structural or other works, by painting, plastering or other decoration or any other means”.

It is advisable, in the light of the above, for a potential buyer to establish the heritage status of a property prior to purchasing. An illegally altered structure may present problems for new owners – particularly when they apply for a permit to undertake alterations.

What to do when unlawful alterations have taken place

Where an owner becomes aware that such alterations have taken place, either by the current owner or a previous owner, he or she should notify the PHRAG, and seek retrospective permission. This is not guaranteed, and in serious cases, could result in alterations already undertaken having to be reversed. Owners are advised to consult a professional heritage consultant. A list of such professionals is available on the Heritage

Portal: www.heritageportal.co.za , or consult the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation: mail@joburgheritage.co.za .

How can I help conserve heritage in my neighbourhood?

Be vigilant: note changes to structures and gardens, and don't hesitate to notify the authorities where you suspect unlawful activity. Sec 50(2) of the Act designates every SAPS member as a heritage inspector with full powers. Community pressure is necessary to make this a functional reality – remember:

Our heritage is in your hands