

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic structures represent tangible links with the past. They provide a community with a sense of identity, stability, and orientation. Within many Southeast Michigan communities, historical resources play an integral role in defining community character.

Historic preservation involves identifying and protecting those community resources most clearly associated with its unique historic character. Planning for historic preservation involves defining “community character,” identifying those elements of the community that represent that character, and devising strategies for assuring their preservation.

Building a consensus is an important step in defining “community character.” Historic and cultural resources that are 50 years old or more and can be targeted for preservation include:

- Single landmarks or development clusters that form landmarks areas.
- Entire blocks of buildings united in character.
- Historic settings, including farms, land and river corridors, trees, scenic vistas, and historic landscapes.

KEEPING IT CONNECTED

Historic landmarks that are located in downtown areas can be integral to the design and style of streetscape improvements. Remember to incorporate historic features into your community’s streetscape design plan and master planning efforts.

Planning and Regulatory Considerations

Historic preservation laws exist at the federal, state, and local levels. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, amended in 1980 and 1992, establishes federal policy for preserving of cultural and historic resources in the United States. The law establishes a national preservation program, encouraging the identification and protection of historic resources at the federal, state, and local level. The act has these major components:

- It authorizes the expansion and maintenance of the National Register of Historic Places.
- It establishes a protective review process to ensure that federal agencies consider the effects of federally licensed, regulated, or funded activities on historic properties listed in the National Register.
- It requires federal agencies to locate, inventory, and nominate such properties to the National Registry,



The historic Octagon House in Washington Township.

assume responsibility for them, and to use them to the maximum extent possible.

- It authorizes each state to establish a State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Established in response to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) identifies, evaluates, registers, interprets, and protects Michigan’s wealth of historic properties, from significant buildings to shipwrecked vessels. The SHPO provides individuals, communities, and preservation organizations with a variety of services, training, and funding opportunities. It also reviews nominations to the National Register of Historic Places and oversees the Michigan Historical Marker Program, the Centennial Farm Program, the Certified Local Government Program, the Michigan Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program, and the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program. Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the SHPO reviews all federal undertakings for impacts on historic properties.

Local governments regulate private actions affecting historic properties through a special permitting process. They are typically granted authority to designate historic properties and districts and to prevent incompatible alterations, demolition, or new construction. Sometimes, enabling laws may also establish a specific process for considering economic hardship claims, special merit exceptions, demolition by neglect, and even appeals.

Tools for Historic Preservation

There are significant tools that can be used to shape, modify, strengthen, and improve preservation programs. Communities must determine what properties should be subject to protection. Communities can convene a

historic commission through which historic preservation efforts can be locally regulated, as well as coordinated at the state level. Use the tools discussed below:

- Identify and evaluate historic buildings and areas.
- Develop a historic preservation plan.
- Create a local historic preservation ordinance.
- Rehabilitate properties through historic preservation tax incentives.

Identify and evaluate historic preservation buildings and areas

Historic properties surveys identify and evaluate resources in communities, neighborhoods, and rural areas to determine their historical, architectural, archaeological, engineering, or cultural significance. This information provides a foundation for preservation and future development decision making. The survey data becomes part of the Michigan SHPO's comprehensive statewide survey.

With regard to historic districts, some communities recognize that buildings can have different degrees of historical importance. In order to define those differences, buildings may be classified into categories.

Identify significant historic buildings

These buildings contribute uniquely to the character of the historic district. In most cases they retain a basic integrity of architectural design, materials, and workmanship. They include buildings of individual

prominence and buildings whose great value is their membership in a block of similar age and style. Some have special value because of the people and events associated with them.

Identify complementary buildings

These buildings contribute to the overall historic character of the district by providing the essential, appropriate setting for the "significant" structures. While individually they are less outstanding, they are consistent in terms of age, materials, scale, mass, and architectural details.

Develop a Historic Preservation Plan

Developing a historic preservation plan is critical to the preservation and maintenance of a community's historically significant buildings and features. Officials should discuss what form the plan should take, either as a component of the community's master plan or comprehensive plan, or as a separate, stand-alone plan. There are several important elements to include when creating a historic preservation plan.

- Statement of the goals of preservation in the community, and the purpose of the preservation plan.
- Definitions of the historic character of the state, region, community, or neighborhood.
- Summary of past and current efforts to preserve the community's or neighborhood's character.
- Survey of historic resources in the community or neighborhood, or a definition of the type of survey that should be conducted in communities that have not yet completed a survey.
- Explanation of the legal basis for protection of historic resources in the state and community.
- Statement of the relationship between historic preservation and other local land use and growth management authority, such as the zoning ordinance.
- Statement of the public sector's responsibilities toward city-owned historic resources, such as public buildings, parks, streets, etc., and for ensuring that public actions do not adversely affect historic resources.
- Statement of incentives that are, or should be, available to assist in the preservation of the community's historic resources.
- Statement of the relationship between historic preservation and the community's educational system and program.
- A precise statement of goals and policies, including a specific agenda for future action to accomplish those goals.

Source: White, Bradford and Roddewig, Richard. *Preparing a Historic Preservation Plan*. Planning Advisory Service Bulletin No. 450. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association, 1994.

Figure 11
Historic Structure Standards



The City of Ypsilanti Historic Commission maintains standards for historic residential homes which include design guidelines for porches, doors, windows, fences, roofing, and guidelines for paint color.

Create a local historic preservation ordinance

Besides establishing a historic preservation commission, local historic preservation ordinances generally set forth procedures and criteria for designating properties, along with procedures and criteria for reviewing requests to alter, move, or demolish such properties. Ordinances should also outline design and maintenance guidelines. Preservation ordinances also allow for consideration of hardship and other special concerns and establish a process for appeal and enforcement of its terms. Typical components of a preservation ordinance include:

- a statement of “Purpose” and “Powers and Authorities,”
- definitions of landmarks and historic districts,
- establishment and authority of a historic preservation commission or other administrative board,
- criteria and procedures for designation of historic landmarks and districts,
- statement of actions reviewable by the commission and the legal effect of such review,
- criteria and procedure for review of such actions,
- standards and procedures for the review of “economic hardship claims,”
- maintenance requirements and procedures governing situations of demolition by neglect,
- procedures for appeal from final preservation commission decision, and
- fines and penalties for violation of ordinance provisions.

While the above provisions are critical to historic preservation efforts, it is important that historic district ordinances also outline in detail design and maintenance guidelines that must be followed. It is important to note that communities can also incorporate and adopt a design review ordinance, for building design and renovation as part of a community’s general zoning ordinance. A design review ordinance and guidelines provide a measure of control not normally part of site plan review. Strict adherence to these regulations will help to maintain the character of the area or site. General guidelines can include: paint color options, window design, porch design, door design, and general structural requirements.

Rehabilitate properties through historic preservation tax incentives

State tax credits are available to homeowners, commercial property owners, and businesses who rehabilitate their properties according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. The property and the rehabilitation must be certified by the Michigan SHPO.

Federal income tax credits are available for owners of national-register-listed, income-producing properties

who rehabilitate their properties according to the Secretary of the Interior’s standards. Federal tax credit projects must be certified by the National Park Service, in consultation with the SHPO. Local governments can contact the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office for more details about acquiring these credits.

Information on the programs outlined above can be obtained by contacting the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office at (517) 373-1630.

Receive assistance from the Historic Preservation Fund

This fund is the source of a 60- 40 matching grant-in-aid program. The federal funds provided through the grant must be matched by the grant recipient with private funds, local government funds, in-kind services, state funds, donated services, and/or donated equipment or material.

Register with the National Register of Historic Places

This identifies historic and cultural resources throughout the nation. While listing in the National Register is primarily honorary, it enables property owners to qualify for federal tax benefits and, in some cases, may be used as the basis for listing at the state and local level.

CASE EXAMPLE

Historic District Commission

Community: City of Ypsilanti

Contact: Jimar Wilson, (743) 483-9646

Ypsilanti is a community with a high concentration of historically and architecturally significant structures. The Historic District has been created to protect and develop this area so that it can continue to be an asset to the city.



City of Ypsilanti historic district.

The Historic District Commission operates under the authority of the city's Historic District Ordinance which was first established in 1978. The ordinance regulates in detail the types of allowable modifications to historic property from paint color, to porch, door, and window design. The Historic District Commission and Ordinance provide protection for the unique historic character of Ypsilanti while promoting growth through private rehabilitation and reuse of the buildings and houses in the district.

Greenmead Historic Village

Community: Livonia

Contact: Marian Renaud, (248) 477-7375

This historic property was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. The 103-acre site has most of the original buildings including barns, a farmhand's house, a caretaker's cottage, carriage house, Newburg School, and various smaller structures. Also

located on the site are Hill House Museum and Hill House Gardens. The gardens are cared for and maintained by community volunteers. The preservation of a landmark such as Greenmead Village provides the community with a strong sense of its history and heritage.



Greenmead Historic Village in Livonia is one example of gathering historic structures into a village setting.

Additional Resources

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