

# **G/FLRPC Spring Regional Roundtable: Historic Preservation & Public Consensus Building**

**Ebenezer Watts Conference Center  
Rochester, New York**

**Friday, March 16, 2007  
9:30AM to Noon**

## **LOCAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ISSUES: HOW AND WHY?**

### *What are some of the primary issues of concern?*

- Traditional urban design ordinance. Recently drafted and approved in the City of Geneva. It provides guidance for new development in the downtown and preserving historic buildings. Local concerns were voiced regarding the ordinance's restrictions on private property rights, such as the potential to slow new development and investment.
- Village of Scottsville/Town of Wheatland Rochester Street Historic District. Recent turnover of historic home ownership is a concern. New residents are unaware of the relevance of the historic district. Guidelines/process need to be conveyed and clarified to new home owners and residents; steps are being taken therein. Other models are available such as the City of Utica and various Certified Local Governments (CLGs).
- Comprehensive Plan of the Town of Williamson addresses historic hamlets to an extent, i.e. Pultneyville. A "Historic Assets Committee" has been created and interim code to prevent demolitions.

There is a general misunderstanding and lack of knowledge regarding the implication of the protections that exist (New York State Register, National Register, etc.) A wide spectrum of tools and protection mechanisms exist and each has different ramifications.

- Don't be embarrassed about loss leading you to action—often that **is** the impetus to action.
- Town of Mendon has a voluntary ordinance in place. This too has challenges. The public and homeowners need to be convinced of the value and level of protection of their properties. The Town is working with the Village of Honeoye Falls to take significant steps toward preservation.
- Misunderstanding of "historic preservation" is common...***Historic Preservation Planning*** is an alternative/better description of the process.
- What constitutes "historical significance?" The public may often be unaware of the nuances of Historic Preservation Planning.
- Public can be very receptive to images of their own community. For instance, properties that may not necessarily register as 'historic' or worthy of preservation in local minds.
- Interpreting/inventorying local resources and having a positive mindset toward preservation is an important baseline step.

“Community Character” is an integral component to planning in Upstate cities, towns, and villages along with transportation, infrastructure, etc. Historic buildings can become a catalyst for further community improvement.

- Larger planning framework for communities and their historic assets is necessary, providing the public with options for utilizing existing buildings.
- State preservation credits...

**Historic Preservation and Economic Development**...historic preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation has significant beneficial economic multipliers within communities.

- There is often criticism regarding historic preservation expenditures. These are definitely value added-investments, however, which need to be explained.

Tourism as a chief source of income for communities (i.e. Village of Palmyra)

- Preservation is recognized as a **deliberate** part of economic development.
- “Re-muddled” buildings (as opposed to “remodeled”). The remodeling often impinges upon the historic value of the building.
- Economic development and education of local officials/public is an important step-by-step process.
- Wayne County has five Erie Canal villages.

Village of Fairport Comprehensive Plan

- Introduction of a historic preservation law. What’s the best way to go about this?
- What are the important components that belong in a comprehensive plan and local ordinance?
- National Register buildings...there have been a myriad of developers interested in buildings in the central business district. This has created dialogue regarding what direction to go and the options to pursue—what’s best for the village and for the structure?
- Local Industrial Development Agency (IDA) is a distinct/helpful local asset.

Level of information/lack of information within local communities, such as grants for National Register buildings and communities with National Register buildings.

- Local preservation boards have no mandate in training for members. Therefore, the level of knowledge varies tremendously. Training is available through SHPO materials, for example. There is a network of information for preservation boards...the problem is getting them together.
- I.e. Village of Geneseo preservation board is having a difficult time getting started, maintaining momentum, and focus.
- Creating an information network for local boards would be beneficial.

SHPO Certified Local Government Program (CLG).

- Statewide CLG Conference in October 2007.
- The Local Landmarker is the newsletter for the Certified Local Government Community and is available online at <http://nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/certified/landmarker.htm>.
- Join the CLG listserv online at [nysclgs@yahoogroups.com](mailto:nysclgs@yahoogroups.com).

Mandatory training for units of government in NYS is in place. Historic preservation is not necessarily going to be part of that training—but inclusion is feasible. This will be determined by the local boards whether they should be encouraged to do so.

- Preservationists can be guilty of isolating themselves from local government at times...
- If goals are not being met, pursue local leadership positions yourself!!
- Town of Greece Preservation Board has taken small steps and has made the important attempts to make the Town Board aware of their efforts.

### Local Government Workshop sessions

- It's difficult for people to attend training workshops during the daytime and regular business hours. Out-of-work hours are important if you want the array of local officials to attend.
- Joint Wayne-Seneca training session coming up...
- Monroe County Department of Planning and Development training sessions are underway...
- Orleans-Niagara joint training evening sessions...
- There's a real need for training at the local level, to get local preservation boards to recognize that they are part of local government process and have distinct responsibilities to the public.

Historic structures are scattered throughout rural municipalities. Local preservationists need to reach out to boards to provide even basic information on assets, inventories, updates, etc.

- Pocket park becomes local landmark out of public concern...impetus for other projects.
- Difficult to approach residents and access resources. Public can be intimidated by the process and investment of time. **Outreach is necessary!!**
- "Site of the Month" as public education and outreach. Opportunity to showcase properties, the preservation board's efforts, the owner's efforts, etc. Visible, non-threatening approach to education and outreach.
- Visioning is important. The local preservation board is a stakeholder in the visioning process.

How or why has preservation become necessary? The discussion here needs to address the larger, macro economic and social issues. Population loss and economic decline has played a major role in the deterioration of important buildings. Until these issues are addressed...how can historic preservation be valued?

- Upstate Paradox: land use decisions.
- Home Rule.
- Upstate communities can be seen as compromising when it comes to Upstate development.
- Inadequate inventories exist of historic assets within communities.
- Historic and cultural resources issues are still not at the same level as environmental, transportation, and other land use issues are.

International Building Code: difficult to understand, expensive to comply with and rehabilitate buildings.

- Preservation is often perceived as a narrow niche area. The public does not see it as economic development and when they do recognize this point, the game changes...
- Lack of education regarding the perception of what the rehabilitation of older buildings involves. General viewpoint that there are too many barriers to overcome—which is often untrue.
- It can be done. It's not easy...but the end results justify the process.
- Labor component alone is "25% higher" for historic preservation projects as opposed to typical development projects.
- Public perception must be changed in this regard.
- Local skilled laborers, however, can be difficult to find.

## WHAT CAN LOCAL PRESERVATION PROGRAMS DO TO EMPOWER INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES? **DISCUSSION OF FEASIBLE SOLUTIONS.**

### *How can we demonstrate and vocalize the need for Historic Preservation Planning?*

#### Urban Renewal.

- Can be seen today in the urban and village landscape.
- Develop a capacity of reviewing the big impacts of federal and state policies.

- Creative incentives do exist!!

### Credibility

- Need to come to consensus with all sectors (developers, realtors, planners, and preservationists, etc.)
- Refer to William Edgar Schmickle, *The Politics of Historic Districts: A Primer for Grassroots Preservation*.
- Relaying the real value of preservation to the public.
- Issue of race and marginalized groups – the issue needs to be brought to all groups.
- Provide design and architectural guideline materials that property owners can use (as a **Best Management Practice**).
- What can you do to enhance the value of your home in a flat market? Improve it!
- Fear that improvements may impact assessments, which is not necessarily so.
- Historic preservation and freezing assessments may be an incentive for your community.
- Historical Societies need to be engaged as an important stakeholder.

### Training/Education

1. Elected Officials
  2. Boards
  3. Outreach tools: websites, list servers, newsletters, open houses, tours, speaker bureaus, local organizations, newspaper articles/editorials
  4. The public is important.
- Realtor Education – Explaining the incentives, regulations, and other issues that pertain to historic properties, districts, etc. Provide professional credits (Greater Rochester Association of Realtors are given instruction by the Landmark Society of Western New York).
  - Landmark Society has many education programs.
  - CLG information and resources.

### Tools

1. Grants
  2. Surveys and asset identification
  3. Organizations (i.e. Business Improvement District)
  4. Model ordinances and design guidelines
  5. Programs that address the various aspects of preservation
  6. “Green” and environmentally-friendly aspects of preservation planning, i.e. Green Building Expo., March 17<sup>th</sup> at Monroe Community College Campus
  7. Linking with local colleges and universities to bring the issues into the classrooms
  8. Coordination – channel and organize the energy in order to create synergy, not stagnation
  9. Certification identifying BMPs for historic preservation
- NYS Historic Preservation Office has CLG information and resources.
  - Preservation League of New York State materials.
  - Formation of LLCs – potential of private sector coordination (i.e. Village of Clyde, Wayne County).

- New Markets Tax Credit Program.

## Planning

1. Comprehensive Planning
  2. Land Use
  3. Economic Development and Strategic Plans
  4. Links between historic preservation and environmental planning
  5. Vision Planning
  6. What is most appropriate for your community?
  7. Corridor Themes – Regional/statewide frameworks, programs, and technical assistance (i.e. Seaway Trail, National Heritage Corridor, etc.)
  8. End Use
- Special projects and plans...themed plans and projects. Smaller initiatives can be effective ways of building momentum.
  - NYS Building Code and Local and State Laws.
  - Code has undergone revisions at the state level—conveying changes to local officials can be difficult.
  - DOS is in the process of training local officials. This is a gradual process which is currently in transition.

## Financing

1. Tax Incentives
  2. Loans
- Small seed grant programs shouldn't be overlooked. The Village of Fairport is funding one through local IDA funds.
  - See Preservation League Newsletter (blue handout provided to Roundtable participants).
  - More information is forthcoming and will aid the public in interpreting new taxation and finance laws.
  - NYS Main Street Program: \$\$\$ for façades and even rear elevations.
  - NYS Small Cities grants.

## Restoration and Maintenance

1. Connection to Economic Development
  2. Tourism
  3. Code Compliance
- Solution and enhancement.
  - Buildings need to remain viable uses.
  - Property maintenance codes and affirmative maintenance.
  - Local commissions and boards.

## Preservation League of New York State

1. Legal Services Program available through the League
  2. Local service providers (Landmark Society, for example) can aid local boards
  3. Commission Partners Training Program for your community's historic resources commission
  4. May 1 Deadline for Preserve NY Grant (partner with NYS Council on the Arts)  
(Funding includes cultural resource surveys, historic structure reports, and historic landscape reports.)
- Jayme Breschard, G/FLRPC distributed model architectural guidelines handbook designed for general audience. Images are critical to conveying information to the public. **The public can become stewards of their historic homes and neighborhoods.**
  - Western Erie Canal Alliance is another key partner.

## ROUNDTABLE WRAP-UP AND POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS...

1. Keep communicating with fellow attendees at today's Roundtable.
2. G/FLRPC will circulate Minutes and provide attendee contact information.
3. G/FLRPC Spring 2007 Local Government Workshop: **Friday, May 11, 2007**  
Burgundy Basin Inn, Pittsford, NY  
For information, agenda, and brochure visit:  
<http://www.gflrpc.org/ProgramAreas/AdditionalServices/Workshops/Spring2007/Spring2007.htm>  
Sessions include: Preservation Planning Tool Kit and Wind Farm Guidelines for Cultural Resources.
4. The Landmark Society of Western New York  
21st Annual Regional Preservation Conference: **Saturday, May 5, 2007**  
First United Methodist Church, Trigon Park (Main Street/Route 5), LeRoy, NY  
For information, agenda, and brochure visit:  
<http://www.landmarksociety.org/section.html?id=1&uid=23>  
Sessions include: Enhancing Main Street: Making Upper Floors Work Again; Promoting Historic Preservation, Economic Redevelopment, and Rural Tourism in Towns and Villages; Porch Restoration A-Z; Historic Cemeteries; and, How to Write a National Register Landmark Nomination.