

Preparing Preservation Plans

Having an effective, focused historic preservation commission is critical to help promote wise stewardship of a community's historic properties. Likewise, preservation planning is a critical component to promoting a community's heritage to tourists. That is why it is important for communities to both establish a historic preservation commission and develop a preservation plan.

The Benefits of a Preservation Plan

Many preservation issues develop very quickly and can easily distract a preservation commission from both its current and future projects. Commissioner turnover and spotty attendance can also be distracting. The two biggest problems commissions face when they do not plan is the inability to attract and keep effective members and the inability to prepare and implement programs. Developing a preservation plan can address these problems by:

1. **Developing Focus** – People are willing to give their time to an organization, but only if the group uses their time efficiently. A plan can help a commission focus itself by determining in advance what projects need to be done, when they need to be done by, and who needs to do them. When a commission has a plan to work from and is committed to that plan, they will likely complete more projects and meet more of their goals in a timely and effective manner.
2. **Attracting Members** – Plans can also help attract better members. If someone looks at a commission and sees a lack of direction and purpose, they are going to be less willing to serve. Potential members should be able to look at a commission's preservation plan to see what its mission is and what projects they have completed and are planning to undertake. They can then more easily envision how they can contribute to that mission and will therefore be more willing to participate.
3. **Prioritizing Projects** – Planning also gives a commission the ability to make critical decisions about how it will invest its limited time and money by prioritizing the preservation issues important in their community. Many grants also look favorably on commissions that have developed and are implementing a preservation plan. The South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office's annual grants to Certified Local Governments is one such program that gives added weight to projects identified as a priority in a preservation plan. Planning also gives a commission the power to say "no" to a proposed project that will not advance the organization's mission.
4. **Educating the Community** – Because a plan packages information about preservation in a concise form, residents can easily understand preservation plans and a preservation commission can use them for public relations purposes. A plan's recommendations section lets the community



know what the commission's future agenda is and provides a "yardstick" to measure progress. People will be supportive if they understand where the commission has been, where it is going, and how preservation can benefit the community.

Preparing a Preservation Plan

Preservation plans vary greatly in size, scope, and complexity. Some commissions contract with a preservation professional to help prepare a plan while other commissions develop a plan on their own. The Rhode Island State Historical Preservation Office developed the following questions to guide communities in creating a preservation plan (taken from a March 28, 1989 letter from Ted Sanderson, the Rhode Island Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, to various members of the preservation community).

- 1) What historical resources exist? Where are they located? In what fashion do they relate to the past and future development of the community?
- 2) Have the identified resources been adequately documented, and evaluated? Are there resources (or entire groups of resources) which have not been identified, documented, or evaluated?
- 3) What preservation activities have already taken place? Are in progress? How effective have they been?
- 4) How and in what way are the community's historic resources threatened?
- 5) What are the community's goals for its historic resources?
- 6) How will the community achieve those goals? Through which specific actions? Who are the actors (private/public; local/state)?
- 7) To what extent is preservation part of the community's overall plan for its development? Does the community intend to integrate preservation into other aspects of its planning (such as housing, taxation, zoning, open space, site plan review, etc.)? Will the community's plans conflict with preserving historic resources?
- 8) Given the identified resources and the present level of preservation activity, which strategies and actions are most important? Which are least important?

Answers to these questions will form the basis for the preservation plan. An excellent guide to developing local historic preservation plans is the National Trust and American Planning Association's publication *Preparing a Historic Preservation Plan*. It lists the following as elements of a good preservation plan:

- statement of goals
- definition of historic character



- summary of past preservation efforts
- historic resources survey
- explanation of the legal basis for historic preservation
- coordinating preservation with zoning, land use, and growth management
- defining public-sector responsibilities
- incentives for preservation
- the relationship between preservation and education
- and an agenda for future action.

Sample plans from South Dakota communities and cities throughout the country are available from the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office.

Funding for Preservation Planning

For those communities wanting to contract with a preservation professional to help them develop a plan, there are grant programs that can provide matching funds for such an activity.

The South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office's annual grants to Certified Local Governments provide matching grants for a wide range of activities, including preparing preservation plans. For more information on the Certified Local Government program in South Dakota, contact the State Historic Preservation Office at 605-773-3458 or shpo@state.sd.us.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation also has grant programs that can provide matching funds for various planning activities. For more information on these programs, contact the Mountains/Plains Office of the National Trust at 303-623-1504 or mpro@nthp.org.

[Back to Cultural Heritage Tourism](#)

