

MAINTAINING RURAL CHARACTER - HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic preservation is the practice of protecting and preserving buildings, farms, properties, and even viewsheds that hold historical significance. It's a way to ensure that these places, which tell the story of our past, remain for future generations to appreciate.

Here's a breakdown of what historic preservation entails:

What is Historic Preservation?

Historic preservation is more than just maintaining old structures. It's a multifaceted approach that includes:

- **Identifying and documenting:** Recognizing properties with historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance and thoroughly recording their features.
- **Protecting:** Implementing measures to safeguard these properties from damage, deterioration, or demolition.
- **Conserving:** Applying appropriate techniques to stabilize, repair, and maintain historic materials and features.
- **Rehabilitating:** Adapting historic properties for modern use while retaining their historic character.
- **Restoring:** Returning a property to a specific period in its history, based on accurate historical documentation.

Why Preserve Historic Places?

- **Sense of place:** Historic places connect us to the past, fostering a sense of identity and belonging within our communities.
- **Cultural heritage:** They embody the stories, traditions, and achievements of previous generations, enriching our understanding of our cultural heritage.
- **Economic benefits:** Historic preservation can revitalize neighborhoods, attract tourism, and create economic opportunities.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Reusing existing buildings reduces waste and embodied energy compared to new construction.
- **Educational value:** Historic places offer tangible learning experiences, providing insights into history, architecture, and culture.

Types of Historic Resources:

- **Buildings:** Houses, commercial structures, public buildings, and industrial sites.
- **Farms:** Agricultural landscapes with historic buildings, fields, and features.
- **Properties:** Larger estates, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes.
- **Viewsheds:** Scenic areas with significant historical or cultural associations.

Preservation Approaches:

- **Preservation:** Focuses on maintaining the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property.
- **Rehabilitation:** Emphasizes repair and adaptive reuse while retaining historic character.
- **Restoration:** Aims to return a property to a specific point in its history through accurate reconstruction.
- **Reconstruction:** Recreating a lost historic property based on historical evidence.

Challenges in Historic Preservation:

- **Funding:** Securing resources for preservation projects can be challenging.
- **Deterioration:** Historic materials require ongoing maintenance and repair to prevent decay.
- **Development pressures:** Balancing preservation with modern development needs can be difficult.
- **Changing uses:** Adapting historic properties for new uses while preserving their character requires careful planning.

How to Get Involved in Historic Preservation:

- **Learn about local history:** Research the history of your community and identify significant historic resources.
- **Support preservation organizations:** Join local or national organizations dedicated to historic preservation.
- **Advocate for preservation:** Contact your elected officials to express your support for preservation policies and initiatives.
- **Volunteer your time:** Participate in preservation projects, tours, or educational programs.
- **Preserve your own property:** If you own a historic property, learn about preservation best practices and consider listing it on a historic register.

Key Resources:

- **National Park Service:** Provides information on historic preservation, including the National Register of Historic Places.
- **State Historic Preservation Offices:** Offer guidance and support for preservation efforts at the state level.
- **Local historic preservation organizations:** Connect with local groups working to preserve historic resources in your community.

By understanding the importance of historic preservation and actively participating in its efforts, you can ensure that these valuable places continue to enrich our lives and communities for generations to come.

DO YOU HAVE A HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT BUILDING, PROPERTY, FARM, VIEWSHED OR CEMETERY ON YOUR LAND?

Getting your property considered historic involves a process of research, documentation, and evaluation. Here's a breakdown of the steps to have your property considered for historic designation:

1. Determine Eligibility

- **Age:** Generally, the property should be at least 50 years old to be considered historic. Properties younger than 50 years old may be considered if they are exceptionally significant.
- **Significance:** The property must meet specific criteria related to its association with historical events, important people, architectural styles, or potential to yield historical information.
- **Integrity:** The property should retain its historic appearance and features to a significant degree. This means that the essential form and materials of the property should be intact.

2. Research and Documentation

- **Gather historical information:** Research the property's history, including its construction date, previous owners, significant events, and architectural details. Utilize resources like local historical societies, libraries, and archives.
- **Document the property:** Take photographs of the interior and exterior, and document any significant features. This documentation will be used to support your application.
- **Consult resources:** Utilize local historical societies, libraries, and archives for research materials.

3. Choose the Appropriate Designation

- **National Register of Historic Places:** This is the most common and widely recognized designation, offering potential benefits like tax incentives and grants.
- **State Register of Historic Resources:** Many states have their own registers, offering similar benefits at the state level.
- **Local Historic Landmark:** Some cities or counties have local landmark programs, providing recognition and protection at the local level.

4. Listing Decision

- **National Register:** The National Park Service will make a final decision on whether to list the property on the National Register.
- **State Register:** The state will notify you of the decision regarding listing on the state register.
- **Local Landmark:** The local historic preservation commission will make the final decision on local landmark designation.

Important Considerations:

- **Time commitment:** The application process can take several months to complete.
- **Costs:** There may be costs associated with research, documentation, and application fees.
- **Property owner consent:** Obtaining owner consent is crucial for the nomination process.
- **Potential restrictions:** Listing on a historic register may come with certain restrictions on alterations or demolition.

Resources:

- **National Park Service:** Provides information on the National Register of Historic Places and other preservation programs.
 - **Website:** www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm
 - You'll find information on eligibility criteria, how to apply, and the benefits of listing.
- **National Trust for Historic Preservation:** A private, non-profit organization dedicated to saving historic places. They offer resources, advocacy, and educational programs.
 - **Website:** www.savingplaces.org

1. New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

- **Website:** <https://parks.ny.gov/shpo/>
- This is your primary point of contact for historic preservation matters in New York. They administer state and federal preservation programs, including the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register of Historic Places, and various grant programs.
- On their website, you'll find information on:
 - Eligibility for historic designation
 - Application processes
 - Tax credits and incentives
 - Environmental review
 - Technical assistance
 - And much more!

2. SHPO Online Tools

- **Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS):** <https://cris.parks.ny.gov/>
- CRIS is an invaluable online database that allows you to:
 - Search for historic buildings, sites, and districts in New York
 - View historic resource inventory forms and National Register nominations
 - Submit project documentation for environmental review
 - And much more!

3. New York State Archives

- **Website:** <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/>
- The State Archives hold a wealth of historical records, including:
 - Maps
 - Photographs
 - Manuscripts
 - Architectural drawings
- These resources can be incredibly helpful for researching the history of your property.

4. New York State Museum

- **Website:** <https://www.nysm.nysed.gov/>
- The museum has extensive collections related to New York history and culture. They also offer resources and grants related to historic preservation.

5. Otsego 2000

- **Website:** <https://www.otsego2000.org/historic-preservation>
- This non-profit organization is a major player in Otsego County's historic preservation efforts. They offer a wide range of services, including:
 - Technical assistance to homeowners and businesses
 - Guidance on applying for state tax credits
 - Support for establishing National Register Historic Districts
 - Workshops and tours on local architecture and history
 - Historic Preservation Awards to recognize exemplary projects

7. Middlefield Historical Association - www.middlefieldhistorical.org

Middlefield Historical Association has a wealth of information, documentation, and insight available through their website, association members and the local historian, Les Rathbun.