



PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

June 13, 2024

PREPARED FOR THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION

Project Name & Address: Historic Preservation Policy Discussion
Legistar File ID # [83867](#)
Prepared By: Heather Bailey, Preservation Planner, Planning Division
Date Prepared: June 10, 2024

Background

The Historic Preservation profession is in a moment of change. The realities of climate change, nationwide housing shortages, and a reevaluation of government processes through an equity lens has resulted in a great deal of discussion among preservation professionals. The Madison Landmarks Commission is one of the local historic preservation commission's leading the way on equitable practice, with how the City approached the 2020 Madison Historic Preservation Plan framed within a Underrepresented Communities Historic Resources Survey, with a Historic Preservation Plan Advisory Committee composed of representatives from each of those underrepresented communities of the survey, and the requirement that all staff and the consultants complete the City's Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative training. While this has been an excellent example that other commission's are adopting, there are a number of new resources that we can learn from as we focus on how we want to engage in the practice of historic preservation in Madison.

Policy Documents

Staff has selected some recent publications from the National Alliance for Preservation Commissions, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Illinois to frame our discussion on the policy and purpose of the Madison Landmarks Commission. The regulatory work of the commission keeps us focused on what we do without a great deal of time to ponder why we are doing it or reflecting on our processes. There have been some big shifts in policy discussions among preservation professionals and these documents from the past couple of years reflect the direction the field is heading.

[NAPC Messaging Guide for Local Preservation Programs, 2021](#)

The National Alliance for Preservation Commissions put out a messaging guide a couple of years ago and staff has shared it previously with the commission. I would encourage commissioners to read through the messaging samples that start on page 34 of the document. A great deal of the other recommendations are things we are already doing: focus on equity (although there's always more work to do there), making tools and processes more accessible, shifting to plain language, etc. Our next steps for public education and outreach with the [Illustrated Design Guidelines](#) will draw from the input in this messaging guide.

[Relevancy Guidebook: How We Can Transform the Future of Preservation, 2023](#)

Landmarks Illinois published a separate guidebook calling for introspection on how to "create a preservation movement that is accessible, inclusive, just and relevant." A contentious point in this guidebook is its first finding that we must "dismantle our culture of preciousness." Staff has had a great deal of discussion on this issue with a wide range of professionals across the nation, and there is not a consensus. We could benefit from discussing why we do historic preservation and if how we're going about it is achieving those ends. The guidebook also has calls for social justice, affordable housing, climate change, and public health. Both the [executive summary](#) and the [full guidebook](#) are included for your review.

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

The Chair of the ACHP, Sara Bronin, has shifted the activities of that Federal agency beyond a nearly exclusive focus on the Section 106 regulatory process to advising on ways to update preservation

practice across a number of areas. Staff has included the policy statements the ACHP has issued on [Climate Change](#), [Housing](#), and [Indigenous Knowledge](#) as relates to burial sites and human remains. Each of those is short and focused with calls to action that have the potential to reshape Federal policies, which will influence State Historic Preservation Office work, and thereby how preservation is practiced at the local level. But the biggest move came in March of this year, when the ACHP Chair issued the [Report and Recommendations on the Application and Interpretation of Federal Historic Preservation Standards](#). The document is 603 pages, most of which are appendices that compile the evidence for the recommendations. The analysis has a great deal of useful history on the development and use of the Secretary of the Interior Standards and how they are applied on Federal undertakings (Historic Preservation Tax Credits and Section 106). Staff recommends focusing on the 10-page Recommendations section of this document (starting page 53 of the document, 59 of the PDF). The recommendations on how to update Federal practice is an excellent framework for evaluating how we undertake preservation work at a local level.