

MESSAGING GUIDE FOR LOCAL PRESERVATION PROGRAMS



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COMMISSIONS

education + training + advocacy

Messaging Guide for Local Preservation Programs



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How to Use This Guide

As someone who works in or with a local government's historic preservation program, you spend your time helping people as much as you can, using the tools you have.

These tools largely include technical standards and specialized terms. You also work in a field that is largely misunderstood. It's no wonder you might have trouble conveying why and how people need to do their part to preserve historic places, or how your work plays an essential role in the life and strength of your community.

To help you communicate more effectively about your work, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) created this guide with significant input from NAPC members and colleagues. You'll find:

- General communications tips
- Tips on word choice, from clarity and jargon to equity concerns and common terms currently under discussion
- Tips on connecting with different audiences and responding to common concerns about historic preservation
- Sample messages to help build support for more effective preservation policy and practice
- Messages addressing general themes and specific connections between preservation and pressing issues, with supporting points and examples
- Sample language and graphics to clarify the local preservation process, particularly design review, and to respond to relevant concerns

Spoiler alert: **The overriding theme of the content in this guide is connection**—connecting your work to other pressing needs in your community, other local departments and initiatives, and other responsibilities of daily life, as well as the power of historic places in connecting people with the past and each other.

While not a quick fix, this guide can help you have more productive conversations, demystify the local preservation process, and position your work as the positive, collaborative effort that it is.

Read on for some tips to help you make the most of the guide.

Note the Key Audience: Local Preservation Programs

We created this guide for the people who steward and implement a local government's preservation program, meaning:

- Members of what we refer to as a local historic preservation commission, also known as a design or architectural review board, landmarks board, cultural heritage commission, or another name
- Staff members who work with a local historic preservation commission, either in a dedicated historic preservation office or as part of your other work in a local planning, community development, or other department

By **local**, we mean the most local form of jurisdiction—typically a city, town, village, township, rural community, or other municipality—though your program may cover a county, region, or other geographic area.

By **preservation program**, we mean the local government structure for recognizing, protecting, and revitalizing older and/or historic places, archaeological sites, and perhaps intangible heritage such as cultural traditions.

A preservation program may be a Certified Local Government program, a non-certified program, or other ways your local government stewards historic places, like historic districts, conservation districts/zoning, and/or legacy business programs.

In addition to local preservation programs, this guide might help preservation professionals who work with commissions, including Certified Local Government (CLG) Coordinators, other staff in State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), and staff of Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs).

The guide does have an internal focus. While the messages themselves are intended for the constituents of local preservation commissions—like elected officials, property owners, developers, and other community members—the tips and accompanying text are not.

Much of the information applies more broadly to historic preservation, and anyone is more than welcome to use it. Advocates, practitioners, educators, and others involved in preservation might find the general messages useful. While not our primary goal, if this guide informs and encourages more cohesive communication throughout the field, all the better!

Copy and Paste

The language in this guide is ready-made. Copy and paste it as much as you'd like! We used a PDF document to preserve formatting, but you can copy and paste from the PDF or export the guide into Microsoft Word (File > Export To > Microsoft Word).

Use the content as is or tailored to your specific needs, wherever you see fit, including (but not limited to):

- Conversations with colleagues and constituents
- Letters, brochures, and other materials for property owners
- Websites and presentations
- Design guidelines/standards, reports, and other documents
- Emails and social media posts
- Handouts, fliers, postcards, posters, and signage

When feasible—for instance, in written materials using a fair amount of content verbatim—please cite this document as:

Messaging Guide for Local Preservation Programs, National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, 2023

Make It Your Own

Every local preservation program is different, and programs change over time. You might already use much of this information, some of it you may never use, and/or you might find different parts useful at different times.

What you do use, you'll need to customize based on your specific needs, terminology, and approach. For instance:

- We use certain terms throughout for consistency (e.g., "commission," "design review"), when you might have a "board" or use "historic review."
- We use brackets where you'll insert certain terms (e.g., "[city/town/region]").
- You can customize two sample graphics on Canva (free account required).
- We note some common preservation terms under discussion and debate; whether/how you use these terms depends on your circumstances.

In general, this guide conveys a holistic view of historic preservation as not just the act of protecting buildings but an essential, versatile element in strengthening communities. The language you use will reflect the purpose of your preservation program, the tenor of your community, and your vision for the future. Regardless of where your program stands along the preservation spectrum, we hope you find this guide a valuable source of ideas and encouragement.

Use as Part of the Big Picture

While we hope this guide helps you in many ways, it has a very specific focus: basic messages and messaging tips for local preservation programs. That means:

- To make it as easy as possible to copy and paste, the content isn't designed and has no images or graphics.
- Since programs vary so widely, this guide has a lot of information. It's not really meant for reading straight through. You might want to skim it for a sense of what's here, then dig into different sections as needed.
- We don't go into depth on communications strategy, preservation policy, community engagement, working with tribal nations or Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, or working with historically excluded communities. These issues are critical but beyond the scope of this project. We do link to a few resources throughout and at the end of the guide.

Keep the Conversation Going

Like preservation policy and practice, language constantly evolves. We welcome your feedback and will use it when we revisit this project in the next few years.

- To let us know what works, what doesn't, and how we can make this guide better, you can [complete this feedback form](#) at any time.
- You can [use the NAPC-L listserv](#) to share your experiences with the guide, exchange ideas, and help each other, as you always do.

We hope you find this guide useful, and we greatly appreciate your vital work.

Navigation Tips

- The **Table of Contents** links directly to pages; you can also use **Bookmarks** in Acrobat (View > Show/Hide > Navigation Panes > Bookmarks).
- We **cross-reference** relevant content using internal links, like "Sources" in the next bullet. In Acrobat, you can return to where you were before clicking an internal link (View > Page Navigation > Previous View). You can use a keyboard shortcut and/or add "Previous View" to your toolbar; details depend on your platform and version of Acrobat Reader.
- Most of the **external links** will likely change at some point. If you have a broken link, you can find the relevant source at the end of the guide (see "[Sources](#)" on page 74), and try pasting the title into a search engine.

General Communications Tips

This guide seeks to help you foster accurate perceptions of your work by conveying it in a positive yet realistic way. [How you frame your messages](#)—the choices you make about what you say and how you say it—can help people see issues from a different perspective, fostering more productive conversations that build support over time.



Accentuating the positive and minimizing the negative isn't 'selling' or 'spinning,' it's simply telling our own story the way we want it to be told. No one else will tell it for us.

— **Dan Becker**, Owner and Consulting Principal,
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Below, we offer a few basic communications tips you might find helpful.

Look to the Future

We often say that historic preservation is about the future, not just the past. You can use this same forward-thinking approach to frame effective messages by:

- [Highlighting solutions](#)—how older and historic places have benefited your community, how design guidelines offer flexibility to meet project goals, even how preservation policy can change over time
- [Speaking to shared values and aspirations](#)—fundamental human beliefs about ourselves, the world, the kind of people we want to be, and the future we want to see, such as:
 - Belonging: We all want to belong.
 - Connection: We have a deep human need for connection.
 - Fairness (Equity): We all share some basic needs, like health, safety, and the opportunity to succeed.
 - Agency: We have the power to make a difference.
 - Collaboration: We're stronger when we work together.
 - Respect: We respect each other, even when we disagree.
 - Responsibility: Our community is better off when we all do our part.

These are deep, moral beliefs that are widely shared and typically don't change over time. Public agencies adopt similar values to guide strategy and operations, which can help you with broader issues (see "[Advancing Policy and Practice](#)" on page 29).

Use Specific Local Examples

You can talk all day about why preservation matters, but you likely won't get very far without specific examples to prove your point.

Real-world examples—of successful projects, effective programs, even cautionary tales—play an essential role in messaging. They're little stories, and our brains are hard-wired for stories: they're how we make sense of the world.

Examples provide the “social proof” that motivates our behavior and lowers the perceived risk of an unfamiliar approach (“Others do it, too!”). Local examples make your message immediate and relevant, while offering your commission the chance to celebrate success. Examples from other areas can help you make the case for a similar project or program.

We know specific local examples are hard to find for many of you. While this project couldn't provide them for the vast range of scenarios local programs face nationwide, the messaging sections that follow offer:

- A range of supporting points that apply more broadly
- Suggested types of examples that might work best for different topics
- Links to specific examples, many offered by peer reviewers (thank you!)

If you don't have ready access to examples, you might find help from:

- The [NAPC-L listserv](#), a great source of info from your peers
- Another local department (e.g., planning, housing, community development, inspections, communications/public information office)
- A local, statewide, or regional preservation or history nonprofit/advocacy group
- Your State Historic Preservation Office
- A neighboring community
- A trusted volunteer

These sources have examples for selected U.S. cities, though some are several years old:

- [*Twenty-Four Reasons Historic Preservation Is Good for Your Community*](#) (PlaceEconomics, 2020)
- [Atlas of ReUrbanism](#) (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2016)
- [Main Street America Programs](#)
- [Lead the Change Case Study Explorer](#) (a new tool from the National Trust for Historic Preservation—add yours to help it grow!)

Use Images and Graphics

While this guide focuses on words, we all know the immediate power of an image or graphic. Before-and-after photos vividly convey successful preservation projects; staff photos on your website humanize your program; historic images connect past with present.

There is no substitute for professional photography or graphic design. But when you need materials quickly and at no cost, apps like [Canva](#) allow non-designers to create relatively polished graphics. Some professional designers can create graphics templates for you to customize as needed.

You and/or your colleagues likely take many of the photos you use. For high-quality images that will serve you well in different ways, try to:

- Include people—working on a project, using a space, smiling from a porch, etc.
- Take them in high resolution (300 dpi at 100%)
- Make sure they include what you need to convey about a place or project
- Take as many photos as you can, from different distances and vantage points, so you'll end up with some good options

You can also get high-quality photos from other people who are more than happy to share them for a good cause. In addition to the owner's permission, be sure to get (and use!) captions and credits.

You might find good photos from:

- People involved in the project/place, from residents and business owners to construction firms (great for showing work in progress)
- A nonprofit organization (historical society, advocacy/education group)
- Social media (Instagram, Facebook, Google Images, Flickr)
- A local photography club

In all cases, check the rights and get proper permissions.

It takes time and effort to acquire and manage high-quality photos, but having them at the ready will save you time and serve you well in the long run.

Myths: Replace, Don't Repeat

We all love a good comparison chart, and you likely face many common misconceptions about historic preservation. In talking about your work, it may be tempting to refute inaccuracies in a “myth/truth” format, like:

Myth: Preservation prevents low-income and affordable housing.

Fact: Solving the housing crisis takes a mix of approaches, including using existing buildings.

Yet [myth-busting can backfire](#) by reinforcing people’s existing positions and beliefs. Simply repeating a myth makes us more likely to remember it as true. And we tend to reject information that conflicts with our existing worldview, is complex and hard to process, or comes from someone we don’t know or trust.

Instead of refuting a myth, try:

- Ignoring the myth and replacing it with the real story
- Making the reality as easy as possible to understand—ideally with a specific example
- [Prebunking](#) when you can, to keep a myth from taking hold in the first place

Use Data Carefully

While facts are key to supporting your positions, too much data—or starting with a flood of it—[can be too abstract and overwhelming](#). Humans are hard-wired for stories, not numbers.

How you use data depends on the context and audience. Some people want spreadsheets and pro formas. When you can, try to tell a story with the data to place it in context and underscore its value.

[TheCaseMade has a tip sheet](#) on using various types of data, such as:

- Survey responses
- Return on investment (both financial and social)
- Stories
- Quotes from local leaders
- Data from pilot programs

There’s no shortage of resources for data storytelling; [this Harvard Business Review article](#) offers a nice summary.

Make Information Easy to Use

On a technical level, you can make print, digital, and in-person communications (webinars, events, etc.) easier for people to use by:

- **Translating content into your audience’s language(s):** Your local, county, or state government might have resources for translation and interpretation, and/or you could build it into project and/or grant budgets.
- **Making content accessible to people with disabilities:** Your jurisdiction likely has a policy (like [this one for the City and County of Denver](#)). Most document apps (Word, PDF, etc.) have a built-in accessibility checker. Free online resources include this [visual design guide/checker](#) from the U.S. General Services Administration, [Web Accessibility in Mind \(WebAIM\)](#) from Utah State University, and these [tips on various print and digital formats](#) from the Illinois Department of Human Services.
- **Reviewing your website and other materials:** Can someone unfamiliar with preservation find what they need quickly and understand it? What types of information can you convey visually, in flow charts or diagrams? (See [“Sample Graphic: Do You Need Design Review?”](#) on page 62 and [“Sample Graphic: Design Review at a Glance”](#) on page 63.)

Keep At It

Perceptions of your work didn’t form overnight, and they won’t change overnight. By starting small, finding the approaches and messages that work best for your program, and using effective communications consistently, you can make slow but steady progress that you can sustain over time. Every little bit helps!

Tips on Word Choice

Clarity

Using clear language is not just a good idea; it's the law. The [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) requires federal agencies to write "clear Government communication that the public can understand and use." While the law doesn't apply to local agencies, the reason behind it—to "enhance citizen access to Government information and services"—certainly does.

Clear language features some key elements, including:

- A more informal, conversational tone than academic or legislative writing
- Active voice
- Short words, sentences, and paragraphs
- Descriptive subheadings to help in skimming
- Bulleted lists to break up text

Among many other sources, the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration has [great resources for plain writing](#).

Jargon

When should you use jargon? Some people say, **never!** The truth is, in your work, you do need it sometimes, depending on the context and audience. But please make sure it's absolutely necessary, and make it as clear as possible.

Acronyms and preservation-specific terms we use every day mean nothing to most people. When you're talking generally about why preservation matters or how it works in your community, steer clear of terms unfamiliar to your audience.

While context is everything and no one agrees across the board, avoiding jargon might include, for example, using:

- "Culture" instead of "cultural heritage"
- "Everyday" instead of "vernacular"
- "Historic materials" instead of "historic fabric"
- "Importance" instead of "significance"
- "Neighbors" or "residents" instead of "citizens"
- "Place" instead of "resource"

Specific word choices can also help you strike a balance between realism and optimism. In many cases, for instance, you might be able to replace words like “rules,” “regulations,” and “restrictions” with more neutral terms like “standards,” “guidelines,” and “responsibilities.”

When navigating the process of design review, designation, or another aspect of your preservation program, people need to know what they need to know. If you absolutely must use a technical term with someone who doesn’t know what it means:

- Clearly define it using plain language.
- Provide an example that defines the term.
- Always use the full term, not the acronym.

You might want to create a glossary if you don’t have one. Plenty of examples exist; [here’s one from the City and Borough of Juneau](#). If you’d like to tailor an existing glossary to your specific terminology, obtain permission and cite your source(s).

[NAPC’s Technical Assistance page](#) includes [a summary of common preservation terms](#), developed by NAPC CAMP Trainer Adrienne Burke.

Equity

Language plays an important role in your efforts to advance equity in your work and your community. “Words have the power to harm or to heal,” writes Alex Kapitan, the [Radical Copyeditor](#). While [conscious language](#) is a broad topic, basic tips include:

- **Consider the context.** There’s no single right way to use language. Rather than being “correct,” focus on the context and how your language might affect the person or people you’re communicating with or about.
- If the context requires you to specify an aspect of someone’s identity, **ask them how they want to be identified**, and identify them as specifically as possible (e.g., by country or region of origin/ancestry, Native nation affiliation, gender identity, or disability).
- Build trust by using “**language of accountability** for past (and current) harm,” writes peer reviewer k. kennedy Whitters, AIA, founder of [@unRedact the Facts](#). This includes using the active voice (e.g., “the City’s urban renewal program displaced Black residents”), acknowledging intent (e.g., using “historically excluded” or “historically neglected” rather than “underrepresented”), and avoiding euphemisms (e.g., “minority,” “at-risk”).
- **Describe people in a positive context.** [Asset framing](#) emphasizes people’s strengths, aspirations, and contributions, as opposed to “deficit” or victimizing language.

Common Terms, Revisited

Language evolves constantly. As of June 2023, preservation professionals and social justice advocates question the use of some terms common to local preservation programs, including those listed below. While we don't have the answers to these complex issues, we want you to be aware of them, and we offer a few suggestions.

Term	Concern(s)	Consideration(s)
"Appropriate"	<p>Many consider it vague, subjective, and/or authoritative.</p> <p>Some suggest renaming "Certificate of Appropriateness" (COA) as "Certificate of Approval" or simply "Historic Approval."</p>	<p>Ubiquitous in design review because of its use in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.</p> <p>You might be able to change the name of the COA form without changing your preservation ordinance.</p>
"Character"	<p>Many consider it vague and not easily (or often) defined, which can hinder evaluation and foster claims of subjectivity.</p> <p>Some consider it a signal of exclusion and structural racism.</p>	<p>Widely used as a key benefit of preservation: maintaining the distinct character of a building, neighborhood, community, etc.</p> <p>Might be cited in relevant legislation; avoiding it could possibly have legal implications.</p>
"Empower"	<p>Many consider it condescending; implies that people and communities don't already have power.</p>	<p>Consider alternatives like "help," "support," and "facilitate."</p>

Common Terms, Revisited (contd.)

Term	Concern(s)	Consideration(s)
<p>Gender, ethnicity, race, ability, and other aspects of identity, e.g.:</p> <p>African American, Black, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Indigenous, American Indian, Native American, Latino/a/e/x, Chicano/x, Latin American, Mexican American, Hispanic, people of color, BIPOC, White, multiracial, multiethnic, women, LGBTQIA+, same-sex, non-binary, trans(gender), people with disabilities</p>	<p>Constantly evolving; no consensus; sample concerns include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many (not all) consider “BIPOC” outdated; specifies Black and Indigenous people but not other people of color. • “Latinx” often preferred by younger audiences; “Latine” growing popular as another gender-neutral term; “Latino/a” or “Hispanic” might be preferred by older audiences, though many consider “Hispanic” outdated and/or offensive. • Preferences vary widely among “Indigenous,” “Native American,” and “American Indian.” • “Black” is typically capitalized at this point; many equity and anti-racism advocates <u>capitalize “White.”</u> • Aspects of identity intersect in different ways, risking oversimplification and/or misleading use. 	<p>Context is everything. There’s no one right answer.</p> <p>Ask people how they want to be identified, and be as specific as possible (e.g., country or region of origin or ancestry, Native nation affiliation, gender identity, or disability).</p> <p>For instance, Abigail Christman of the City and County of Denver reports, “With community input, our recent Latino context evolved into ‘Mexican American/Chicano/Latino Histories in Denver.’”</p> <p>Accept that you’ll make mistakes; apologize and learn from them.</p> <p>For more, see “Tips on Word Choice: <u>Equity</u>” on page 15.</p>

Common Terms, Revisited (contd.)

Term	Concern(s)	Consideration(s)
<p>“Government”</p>	<p>Trust in government is near historic lows.</p>	<p>People who conflate preservation programs with historical societies may need to hear “government” to see the difference.</p> <p>In other cases, consider terms like “programs” or “agencies.”</p> <p>Focus on the people in public service over the institution.</p>
<p>“Historic integrity”</p>	<p>Concept and standards widely debated as our work includes more places with cultural, not architectural, merit.</p> <p>Less objective than presented; may or may not include changes over time.</p>	<p>Embedded into the national language/ process that informs most local preservation programs.</p> <p>No suggestions; just FYI (though you may be well aware and part of these conversations).</p>
<p>“Historic preservation” (Also see “About ‘Historic Preservation’” below)</p>	<p>Fraught with negative and inaccurate connotations; vague because used so broadly.</p> <p>Double meaning with technical “preservation.”</p> <p>Used primarily in the U.S.; “heritage conservation” used worldwide.</p>	<p>Foundational to U.S. legislation and standards.</p> <p>Convenient shorthand in documents like this and throughout the field.</p> <p>Potential for reclaiming the term over time.</p> <p>Use specific descriptions; try “conservation” as shorthand.</p>

Common Terms, Revisited (contd.)

Term	Concern(s)	Consideration(s)
"Policy"	Could be perceived as unchangeable and created without community input (which might be true).	One of few alternatives we have for stricter terms like "regulation." Could describe as current "rules of the game" that can/should change as needed.
"Property"	Focus on ownership can imply exclusion. Many (not all) prefer "place" or "site."	Ubiquitous in planning/development. Identify specifically when possible ("school," "house").
"Underrepresented communities"	Doesn't acknowledge the reason for/intent behind the underrepresentation. "Marginalized" also debated.	Consider "historically excluded," "historically neglected," or perhaps " <u>underrecognized</u> ."

About "Historic Preservation"

Despite many years of debate over the term "historic preservation," it remains ubiquitous in the field. The term's pervasiveness in the laws, standards, titles, and processes you use every day makes it hard to dismiss. While we might be able to reclaim the term over time, the ongoing use of "historic preservation/preservation" increasingly undermines our efforts to convey what we do and why it matters.



We use "preservation" to mean so many things that it doesn't have a clear meaning for most people. Continuing to use it as shorthand for all these things means that we forfeit its definition to whatever connotations—usually negative—people ascribe to it. If we didn't have access to that word, we would be able to (forced to) articulate more precisely what we mean.

— **Jason Tish**, Preservation Education Coordinator,
Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office

[Rethos](#), a nonprofit based in St. Paul, MN, has had success with the term “the New Preservation,” which helps people pause before dismissing “preservation” outright.

Many people prefer the language of the environmental conservation movement. The built and natural environments intersect, increasingly so as we connect our work more directly to healthy communities, climate action, and environmental sustainability. Peer reviewer Jeremy Wells [has long advocated for terms](#) aligned with the conservation movement, including “historic place conservation” and “conservation of the historic environment.”

Peer reviewer Jason Tish also prefers conservation terms and offers these alternatives to “preservation:”

- The conservation of a historic building through sensitive repair and modernization
- Local policies that help guide the adaptation of places that are important to our community’s identity
- The work of conserving (repairing, modernizing, adapting) important historic properties
- Adapting historic properties to modern uses
- Updating historic properties in ways that maintain their historic character
- The labor-intensive work of repairing and maintaining a historic building
- The community conversation about whether to embrace or erase the physical places where our local history happened
- The retention of historic architecture in our community’s landscape
- The recognition of cool old buildings as great places for cool new businesses
- The recognition of the premium that historic/vintage materials (exposed brick, tin ceilings, crafted woodwork) add to commercial spaces
- The local ethic that prioritizes reuse of vintage buildings over demolition and reconstruction

The conversation continues; please use the [NAPC-L listserv](#) and/or [messaging guide feedback form](#) to share what works for you.

Connecting with Different Audiences

Effective communication starts with listening. The more you understand the specific needs, priorities, and challenges of your audience, the more relevant you can make a message or conversation.

As a volunteer or staff member of a local preservation commission, you may consider your key audiences:

- Elected officials
- Colleagues in local government
- Property owners
- Developers
- Historically excluded communities
- The “general public”

We all filter information through our own backgrounds, biases, and experiences. Yet members of your key audiences share some characteristics based on their roles in historic preservation, which can [help you tailor messages effectively](#). While you likely have other audiences, such as Realtors, these tips focus on those listed above.

Universal Concern

Regardless of the audience, people who disregard historic preservation often have a basic concern with two dimensions, as noted by peer reviewer Ken Bernstein:

They don’t consider preservation a priority.

If people see historic preservation as building-specific, operating in a vacuum, and irrelevant to their lives, it’s easy to consider it “nice to have” but hardly essential. This perception has many consequences, including fewer resources for preservation.

They think preservation actively undermines other needs and priorities.

If people see historic preservation as conflicting with the community’s needs, it’s easy to consider it an active barrier to addressing pressing issues. This perception can create a false choice (e.g., between preservation and affordable housing) that can drastically hinder preservation efforts—and often does.

The single most effective way to address this universal concern is to connect your work to other pressing needs in the community.



If [we] can work preservation into the wider planning process, it becomes something the community just does, rather than an extra committee holding up projects.

— **Jennifer B. Doherty**, Local Government Programs
Coordinator, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Elected Officials

Elected officials and their staff may prioritize and/or value:

- Their constituents: relevance; satisfaction
- The bottom line: data; return on investment
- Leveraging limited resources
- Low risk (or perceived risk) of failure
- Acknowledgment; visibility

Used with specific messages (see “[Messaging: Why Preservation Matters](#)” on page 33), elected officials might find the following **types** of information useful:

- Data on the economic activity generated by the use of older and historic places in their district/purview, ideally connecting preservation to other priorities (e.g., housing, sustainability, equity, and anti-racism)
- Specific success stories from their district/purview (ideally connecting preservation with other priorities) with key facts and personal stories/quotes/photos of constituents
- Stories of longtime small businesses/organizations in their district/purview
- Examples of cost savings from reusing (and/or making additions to) older buildings instead of all-new construction
- Information about the availability and/or impact of preservation incentives for constituents (e.g., historic tax credits)
- Stories about places they might not associate with preservation, such as older affordable housing or small businesses in older buildings
- Comparable facts from other cities, ideally of similar size
- Examples of widespread support for similar efforts
- Photo ops/public thanks for support

If elected officials (and/or other colleagues) consider your commission more like a historical society than a “real” government entity, talk about preservation as a public service and part of local planning/zoning. If they hear from unhappy constituents whose projects weren’t approved, reinforce the vast majority of applications the commission approves, with or without changes.

Beyond messaging, peer reviewers offer these general tips:

- Align your work with other planning efforts and local agencies whenever possible.
- Make sure preservation is part of your comprehensive plan.
- Hold commission meetings in the same space where other official groups meet.
- Have a preservation commissioner also serve on a related commission (e.g., planning).

Colleagues in Local Government

In juggling their own heavy workloads, staff from your department or other areas of local government might:

- Focus exclusively on their domain (e.g., other planning issues, diversity/equity/inclusion initiatives, economic development, housing, environmental sustainability)
- Let the status quo rule, just to get through the day

It's hard to break down silos in virtually any work environment, but you might be able to:

- Learn about colleagues' specific goals and discuss how your work might be able to support them
- Review your comprehensive (or similar) plan to understand broader community goals and identify where/how preservation can play a role
- Find ways to engage in related efforts and community conversations, and introduce your work in the relevant context
- Mention how collaborating on shared goals could offer new funding opportunities, such as historic tax credits and preservation grants

Property Owners

Owners of properties in your program's purview (individually designated landmarks, historic districts, etc.) may have concerns including:

- The time and expense involved in complying with relevant policies
- Any loss of control over their private property
- Lack of awareness or clarity about their responsibilities
- Inconsistent treatment/feeling singled out
- Arbitrary decisions based on personal opinions

You can help address these concerns by:

- Making your processes and timelines clear, transparent, and visible (on your website and in handouts, presentations, etc.)
- Presenting yourself as a facilitator who knows the ropes and wants them to succeed

- Describing commissioners as qualified public servants who base decisions on established standards and guidelines
- Noting that design review often happens quickly and at the staff level (and that it's often less strict than that of homeowners associations)
- Explaining the reason(s) behind a process/requirement
- Acknowledging reality; showing empathy
- For more, see "[Tips: Discussing Design Review](#)" on page 64.

Developers

In terms of your local preservation program, property developers may care most about:

- Maximizing their return on investment
- Saving time and money
- Understanding the process so they can plan and budget accordingly
- Streamlining the process as much as possible

In addition to the tips above for property owners, consider emphasizing:

- Financial incentives, such as historic tax credits
- Any other incentives, such as aspects of building codes or processes that accommodate historic buildings
- The potential marketing and price premiums for buildings with unique features and stories to tell
- Any options for aligning (or combining) steps in the review process

Historically Excluded Communities

It takes far more than messaging to connect meaningfully with people whose history, culture, power, health, and access to opportunity have been systematically excluded by society and institutions—including local government.

Respectful communication and conscious language are essential, as noted in "Tips on Word Choice: [Equity](#)" on page 15. Yet engaging historically excluded communities has much more to do with building trust and relationships over time. We offer a few general resources at the end of this guide (see "[Community Engagement](#)" on page 73). You might have access to more through community organizations and/or your local government's diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or anti-racism initiative(s).

Peer reviewers also offered some general suggestions, including:

- Practice self-awareness: Show genuine interest in listening and understanding; admit to and apologize for mistakes. (Jeremy Wells, PhD, who specifically suggests being a [reflexive practitioner](#))
- Care for your mental health (as advocated by Raina Regan in [Uplifting Preservation](#))—in any case, as well as to “minimize the cycle of harm that shows up as defensiveness,” writes k. kennedy Whitters, AIA.
- Acknowledge policies and practices that have historically harmed, and continue to harm, local communities.
- Work to change policies—for instance, accept interviews and oral histories as documentation for designations. The tradition of oral histories is common among many immigrant communities. By nature of being historically neglected, many communities’ histories were never documented. They may not have the resources for professional documentation, which would be difficult in any case given the lack of primary sources. (Tejpal Singh Bainiwal)
- Recognize the power that communities create and bring to the table.
- Commit to building relationships with, and being accountable to, community members over time.
- Explore ways to meaningfully collaborate to better recognize and preserve what is important to communities.
- Look beyond landmarking to address a community’s other values and priorities when possible.
- Invite people to participate in shaping preservation programs and policies (e.g., through surveys and focus groups, paid internships, paid community advisors or ambassadorships, or service on a local preservation commission).
- Provide access to economic incentives by making connections between affordable housing, job creation, and historic preservation. (Jeremy Wells)

The “General Public”

We often refer to community members as the general public. In terms of communications, [there’s really no such thing](#): If we try to reach everyone, we typically end up with messaging so diluted that we actually reach no one.

While you certainly need to communicate with the broader community, try to tailor messages as much as possible to different needs and circumstances. Your efforts to [understand distinct audiences](#) will pay off well into the future, as you build relationships and trust.

Responding to Concerns about Preservation

Below, we suggest some approaches to common concerns about the value of historic preservation. As noted in "[Myths: Replace, Don't Repeat](#)" on page 12, we don't recommend using a "myth/truth" format for these or any other messages, since [myth-busting can backfire](#).

If you hear or sense ...	Try ...
<p>General disinterest: The sense that preservation doesn't matter or isn't a priority</p>	<p>Connect preservation to other pressing issues through specific examples.</p> <p>Make preservation personal by asking them about places they like and why, having coffee in a rehabbed building, bringing them to places in question, etc.</p> <p>Highlight not just historic places but longtime businesses and organizations they care about.</p> <p>Emphasize historic preservation as a public service and part of broader planning efforts.</p>
<p>Competing priorities: The sense that preservation actively undermines other policy goals (e.g., affordable housing)</p>	<p>Share specific local examples of how reusing historic places advanced a different issue (e.g., affordable housing).</p> <p>Ask for details, find common ground, and address specifics using this guide and/or your experience.</p> <p>Consider the source: Try to find someone else they'll listen to who shares your perspective.</p> <p>Emphasize historic preservation as a public service and part of broader planning efforts.</p>

Responding to Concerns About Preservation (contd.)

If you hear or sense ...	Try ...
<p>Competing priorities (contd.): The sense that preservation actively undermines other policy goals (e.g., affordable housing)</p>	<p>If it's an issue of time, note that most local review processes are quite fast and some steps can be aligned with other processes.</p> <p>Without being defensive, put preservation into perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's just another part of planning and zoning, which already restricts the full use of a property. • It's part of local policy and based on federal legislation. • The legislation stems from a long-held recognition that certain parts of the environment—including open space and places of cultural value—benefit society at large and deserve protection, even when they're privately owned.
<p>Lack of clarity around the preservation commission's purpose, that it's more like the historical society than a "real" government entity</p>	<p>Emphasize preservation as a public service and part of local planning/zoning.</p> <p>Beyond messaging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold commission meetings in the same space used by other commissions. • Have a commissioner also serve on another commission (e.g., planning).
<p>Lack of funding</p>	<p>Suggest working with other departments on a shared goal (e.g., affordable housing), which could open the door to tax credits, grants, or other funding streams.</p> <p>Discuss how using local labor and materials (when possible) keeps money in the community, along with other economic benefits like the multiplier effect (see "Local Economy" messaging on page 50).</p>

Responding to Concerns About Preservation (contd.)

If you hear or sense ...	Try ...
Lack of funding (contd.)	Beyond messaging, try to build partnerships (including outside the government), identify volunteers, and find funding to train maintenance crews to care for historic materials and systems (which can lower costs in the long run).
<p>Deflection: The sense that a place can't be significant because it's not great architecture, or it's in a style they don't prefer; or that if we think it's worth saving, we should buy it.</p>	<p>Tell the story of the place in question.</p> <p>Note that what we preserve isn't a matter of personal opinion but public policy.</p>
<p>Distrust: The belief that preservation causes gentrification and only benefits wealthy White people.</p> <p>For more, see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Choice: Equity (page 15) • Audiences: Historically Excluded Communities (page 24) • Messaging: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (page 45) 	<p>Ask what matters to them, and listen.</p> <p>Cite any examples in your community of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How preservation protects smaller older houses and supports local businesses • How historically excluded communities have saved places important to them¹ • Important places that have been lost due to racist or "race-neutral" government policies and practices that neglect or actively harm historically excluded communities

¹The earliest example of this is [the preservation of the Frederick Douglass Home](#) in Washington, D.C. in the 1940s by the National Association of Colored Women, founded by Mary McCleod Bethune in 1935 to combat lynching of Black people by White people. (k. Kennedy Whithers, AIA)

Advancing Policy and Practice

In addition to conveying what you do, why it matters, and how the local preservation process works, messaging can help foster more effective policy and practice. Even if you can't officially advocate for policy changes, you can build support for goals including:

- Inclusion in relevant decisions and plans (e.g., comprehensive plan)
- Coordination with other departments and processes (e.g., [as in New York City](#))
- Consistent code enforcement
- Updating policies, practices, and incentives to meet community needs (including addressing biases and supporting historically excluded communities)
- Regular training for staff and commissioners
- More funding for projects, incentives, and staffing



[... We need to look] at communities in a holistic way that includes preservation as one of the essential elements of healthy communities and not a standalone program.

— **Lauren Hoogkamer**, MSHP/MSUP, Principal Planner,
City of Tacoma, WA (and NAPC CAMP Trainer)

Values-Based Messaging

You can connect your work to the core values of your local government (typically stated in the strategic or comprehensive plan and on the website). These values vary but often include:

- Access and transparency
- Accountability, including responsible stewardship and fiscal management
- Collaboration/teamwork
- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism
- Efficiency
- Environmental sustainability
- Innovation
- Respect

Social science communicators use formulas for values-based messaging, including:

Value + What's at Stake + Opportunity + Benefit

This structure appears below in messages tailored to elected officials and colleagues. You might find it helpful with different content and scenarios.

Sample Messages

Inclusion in Relevant Decisions

We get more done when we work together. Far from a standalone program, historic preservation has inherent connections to a surprising number of local issues, from economic development to equity and anti-racism, housing and sustainability, infrastructure, resilience, even emergency management. When relevant decisions on these and other issues don't fully consider the places people care about, we lose important opportunities and efficiencies that preservation offers. By looking at our community more holistically—for instance, integrating preservation into the comprehensive plan—we can steward local resources more effectively while better serving our residents.

Cross-Departmental Collaboration

People trust us more when they know what's going on. When historic places aren't fully considered in relevant decisions on planning, economic development, and other related issues, we miss the opportunity to inform residents about potential impacts on the places they care about, and how they can make their voices heard. If we work together on decisions that affect these places, we can be more transparent with residents, building trust in both the preservation process and local government.

Supporting Historically Excluded Communities

As we work to build a more just and equitable community, historic preservation has a unique role to play. We can use preservation to acknowledge past harm, build mutual understanding, and help people in different ways. We can address systemic injustice far more effectively if we all understand how our [city/town/region] developed (including patterns of discrimination and erasure); who created (and was excluded from creating) our local preservation program, and who benefits the most from it. Acknowledging this history and past harm can help us start to build relationships and trust with residents whose history and needs have been neglected by their government, including [examples: Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/e/x, Asian American, and LGBTQIA+ communities; women; people with disabilities; and people with low incomes]. By supporting our neighbors' efforts to celebrate their culture and contributions, asking if and how preservation might serve them, and co-creating better preservation policy, we can make our whole community stronger.

Messaging: What Is Historic Preservation?

You might have a highly effective way of describing historic preservation. (We'd love to hear it!) But if you're looking for the basics, this sample text might help. The messages on the value of preservation also describe different aspects of it.

Sample Text

As part of our community's environment, older and historic places play different roles in our everyday lives. You might live or work in an old building or on a family farm. You might see familiar old places on your daily route, go to the same library you went to as a kid, shop at longtime local businesses, or meet friends at vintage bars or cool historic sites.

"Historic preservation" is a very broad term for different ways of treating older places that people care about. It takes many forms, including:

- The hands-on work of maintaining, repairing, restoring, and reusing historic places
- Creating and implementing policies to help people conserve and revitalize places
- Researching, identifying, and recognizing places that matter to communities, from buildings and neighborhoods to rural and commercial areas
- Using existing places to help address urgent issues like affordable housing, environmental sustainability, the economy, and equity and racial justice
- Managing preservation projects, including finding funding
- Considering historic places in local and regional planning
- Advocating for specific places and broader policies to strengthen communities using the places they care about
- Sharing and celebrating stories of the many different people, places, and cultures that helped define our community and help shape our lives every day

People care about older places for different reasons, including:

- They give our community a look, feel, and identity that's unique and meaningful.
- They tell the story of our community.
- They help us understand who we are and where we came from, so we can move forward.
- They're the setting for our daily life.
- They remind us that we belong to something bigger than ourselves.
- They spark emotions that we often can't describe, but that affect us deeply.
- They connect us to our past and each other.
- They teach and inspire us in ways nothing else can.
- We take comfort in their familiarity.
- They're interesting. They have stories. Often, they're part of our stories.
- They're already here, and reusing what we have just makes sense.

The types of places we preserve include:

- Buildings
- Neighborhoods
- Commercial areas
- Landscapes
- Farms and ranches
- Cemeteries
- Infrastructure (bridges, etc.)
- Archaeological sites

Preservation keeps these places safe, meaningful, and part of everyday life. We can also use the tools of preservation to conserve parts of our culture that aren't even places, from traditional construction methods to languages, celebrations, culinary traditions, and much more.

Preservation works differently at the national, state, and local levels. Local programs typically offer the most effective tools to meet a community's specific needs. Unlike a historical society or advocacy group, a local preservation commission is part of local government. The commission reviews nominations for local designation and proposed work on locally designated properties. It offers advice and guidance on caring for historic places, while working to make the use of historic places part of broader community planning and development efforts.

Historic places can be officially recognized (designated) in different ways, including:

- Listing in the National Register of Historic Places: meets national standards of architectural, historical, or cultural importance; approved by the National Park Service
- National Historic Landmark: highest level of designation in the U.S., also approved by the National Park Service
- Listing in the State Register: meets standards for statewide importance; approved by a statewide commission; managed by the State Office of Historic Preservation
- Local Landmark/listed in the local register: meets local standards for special value to the community; approved by the local governing body (e.g., city council) after recommendation by the local preservation commission
- Historic or Conservation District: part or all of a neighborhood or other area; designated at the local level

These types of designation have different benefits and responsibilities, but they all help important places evolve while keeping what makes them meaningful.

Messaging: Why Preservation Matters

Smart people have worked for decades to convey the value of conserving older and historic places. This persistent challenge stems from many factors that lie beyond the scope of this guide, including a need for more research, strategy, and capacity.

But we need help now! We **can** make progress in the meantime by trying new approaches with the knowledge we have. That's what these messages seek to do.

General Themes

The following messages reflect basic themes that can help people see your work from a different perspective:

- **Connection to Pressing Local Issues**—expanding the definition of preservation; setting the stage for issue-specific messages
- **Change and Balance**—addressing perhaps the most common fallacy of preservation while acknowledging reality
- **Shared Stake in the Future**—looking forward; speaking to shared values and aspirations

Each theme includes one sample message tailored to two audiences.

If you see two terms or phrases separated by a slash (e.g., “guides/manages”), these are options that may work better in different cases. Please choose from them or replace them with a term that you know works better, based on your experience.

To provide you with a range of options, most of these messaging tables span more than one page.

<p>Theme</p>	<p>Connection to Pressing Local Issues</p>
<p>Key Message</p>	<p>Preservation is about far more than buildings. It plays an essential role in boosting the local economy; making sure every resident has a safe, affordable home; saving energy and addressing climate change; and working to advance equity and social justice. And it does it all using places people care about.</p>
<p>Supporting Messages</p>	<p>(For relevant messages, see "Specific Issues" on page 39.)</p> <p>Preservation isn't the sole solution to pressing local issues, but we can't solve them without it. We can't build our way out of the housing crisis or bulldoze our way out of climate change. We need to use every tool we have, including our existing places and infrastructure.</p> <p>While preservation supports our community's economic, housing, climate, and equity goals, its ultimate value lies not in the places we steward but in the people whose lives they enrich.</p>
<p>Sample Tailoring</p>	<p>Elected officials, colleagues As responsible stewards of local government, we can multiply our impact and maximize tight budgets with creative solutions that address multiple issues at once. Preservation has an essential role to play in meeting our economic, housing, climate, and equity goals. It's a versatile tool for addressing urgent issues using places people care about. And as a public service, it works best as part of our community's broader planning and development efforts.</p> <p>Property owners, developers, community members You might be surprised at how many issues connect with the older and historic places we care about. Conserving and reusing these places supports affordable housing, is good for the environment, and plays a unique role in making our community more equitable and just. Preservation is just a tool to make life better for people in different ways.</p> <p>(Follow with relevant points from "Specific Issues" on page 39.)</p>

Theme	Change and Balance
Key Messages	<p>Preservation guides/manages change to places people care about.</p> <p>Preservation balances change with continuity/familiarity/stability.</p>
Supporting Messages	<p>Historic places change all the time. We use preservation policies as a tool to navigate that change, so places can evolve while keeping what makes them meaningful.</p> <p>Every place changes in one way or another. Many historic places—from farms and ranches to downtowns—have to change in order to survive. How they change over time is part of their story.</p> <p>Everything changes, including historic places. The trick is in how you do it. That’s why we’re here. We know the ins and outs of working with old places, so we can help people strike that balance between change and continuity—between how a place needs to evolve and what makes it worth keeping.</p> <p>Preservation balances old and new. We need both! By giving old places new uses, making compatible additions, and integrating new development, we get a vibrant mix of places and a distinctive, livable community.</p> <p>Preservation helps small towns and rural areas adapt to changing times. Family businesses like farms and tourism operations use preservation to actively steward the land while passing down their values and sense of place through generations.</p> <p>Preservation is one of several ways we guide change in our community, along with other types of planning and zoning. It focuses on places that have special value because of what they mean to us, how they make our community distinct, and how they connect us with our past and with each other.</p> <p>Preservation keeps our community distinct and sustains the quality of life that attracts residents, businesses, and visitors.</p>

<p>Theme</p>	<p>Change and Balance (contd.)</p>
<p>Supporting Messages (contd.)</p>	<p>Preservation balances property rights with the public interest. Preservation policy stems from a long-held recognition that certain elements of our environment—including open space and places of cultural value—benefit society at large and deserve protection, even if they’re privately owned.</p> <p>We use preservation to navigate change, not stop it. It’s true that preservation policies have been used in the past to stop change and keep people out of certain neighborhoods. But it’s used far more often as tool for change, especially as we work to make our communities more equitable and just. This includes updating policies and practices as needed so that preservation works better for everyone.</p>
<p>Sample Tailoring</p>	<p>For elected officials and colleagues in local government Preservation policy balances property rights with the public interest. It stems from a long-held recognition that certain parts of our environment—including open space and places of cultural value—benefit society at large and deserve protection, even if they’re privately owned. The more we can help residents care for their historic places, the better we serve the community.</p> <p>For property owners, developers, community members Preservation balances property rights with the public interest. It’s part of owning property in [city/state/region]; it just adds a step because your place has special value to the community. We know this is an extra responsibility, and we’re here to make the process as smooth as possible for you.</p>

Theme	Shared Stake in the Future
Key Message	Historic preservation uses our past to help us move forward.
Supporting Messages	<p>Our older and historic places are evidence of our community’s strength and endurance. They remind us that we’re all part of a bigger story. The investments we make over time—in schools, parks, neighborhoods, and places we care about—say something about who we are, what we value, and how we want to be remembered.</p> <p>Historic places show us how the past directly affects our lives today. By making sure we don’t lose the places that tell our stories—good and bad—we can understand, celebrate, and reconcile our past.</p> <p>Reflecting on our history is essential to understanding our identity and envisioning our future. Where we live, the air we breathe, the schools our kids attend, the opportunities we have—or don’t have—all stem from how our community developed.</p> <p>The places we’ve preserved—and the scars of those we haven’t—show us how we got to where we are today, from walkable neighborhoods we enjoy to entire neighborhoods destroyed through decades of discrimination. Understanding why our community is the way it is can help us become the community we want to be.</p> <p>Preservation is a powerful tool for teaching, acknowledging, and reconciling our history. We can work together to determine how to treat places that reflect difficult parts of our past.</p> <p>In the end, it’s up to us to decide what kind of community we want to be, and what kind of community we want to leave future generations. By caring for the places people care about, we can help shape the future we envision.</p>

<p>Theme</p>	<p>Shared Stake in the Future (contd.)</p>
<p>Sample Tailoring</p>	<p>For elected officials and colleagues in local government As current stewards of local government, we have a shared responsibility to leave our community better than we found it. Imagine what we can achieve if we bring together residents of all backgrounds and experiences to learn from our past, celebrate and reconcile it, and use it to shape the future we want to see.</p> <p>For property owners, developers, community members Historic places show us how the past directly affects our lives today. Where we live, the air we breathe, the schools our kids attend, the opportunities we have—or don't have—all stem from how our community developed. Historic preservation is a powerful tool for understanding, celebrating, and reconciling our past. In the end, it's up to us to decide what kind of community we want to be. What do we want to leave future generations? By caring for the places we care about, we can shape the future we want to see.</p>

Specific Issues

The following messages address the connections between historic preservation and other pressing issues, listed in alphabetical order:

- Affordable Housing (some overlap with Density)
- Density (some overlap with Affordable Housing)
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism
- Health and Well-Being
- Local Economy
- Sustainability and Climate Change

Your community may not face certain issues, like the need for greater density.

These messages include supporting points backed by facts from reliable and relatively recent sources (most published within the past five years). If we couldn't corroborate a point, even one long- and widely used, we erred on the side of caution and didn't include it.

If you see two terms or phrases separated by a slash (e.g., "save the planet/fight climate change"), these are options that may work better in different cases. Please choose from them or replace them with a term that you know works better, based on your experience.

To provide you with a range of options, most of these messaging tables span more than one page.

General Position: An Essential Part of the Solution

With these complex, evolving, and interrelated issues, we recommend a general approach to preservation as not **the** solution but **an essential part** of the solution. This approach positions your work realistically yet optimistically while conveying the need for (and value of) collaboration.

<p>Issue</p>	<p>Affordable Housing (some overlap with Density)</p>
<p>Key Message</p>	<p>Solving the affordable housing crisis will take a mix of approaches, including the use of older and historic places. By keeping the affordable housing we already have, adapting existing buildings for residential use, and adding compatible new housing to older neighborhoods, we can help make sure everyone in our community has a safe, affordable home.</p>
<p>Supporting Points</p>	<p>Most of the country’s <u>existing affordable rental housing</u> is unsubsidized, privately owned, and at risk.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s typically in older, smaller buildings—including historic homes and districts—and might be subject to <u>rent stabilization</u> policy. • Much of this housing is for low-income residents and in historically excluded communities, making the buildings more vulnerable to demolition and replacement with new housing that is not affordable to current residents. • <u>New construction can’t keep up with demand</u>, and the vast majority of new construction isn’t affordable to low- and middle-income residents. • We can <u>keep this housing safe and affordable at a fraction of the cost of new construction</u>, updating it to meet new needs while keeping these residents in their homes. <p>Older neighborhoods often offer <u>a mix of housing options</u>, including multifamily and smaller homes that tend to be more affordable than newer ones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mix of housing options strengthens neighborhoods in several ways, from <u>educational outcomes</u> to <u>resilience in economic downturns</u>. • These neighborhoods can often accommodate more housing through accessory dwelling units and compatible infill.

Issue	Affordable Housing (contd.)
Supporting Points (contd.)	<p>Converting old buildings for residential use (often with compatible additions) creates thousands of affordable housing units each year, often at lower costs than new construction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic tax credits make much of this work possible, often in combination with other financial incentives, such as low-income housing tax credits. • While historic tax credit projects are widely successful, their complexity can deter some developers. Some preservation consultants specialize in helping developers navigate the process and make best use of tax credits. <p>Many historic commercial buildings originally had housing on upper floors, but zoning changes over time have prevented this type of use. Programs like UpstairsDowntown™ and Main Street America's At Home on Main Street seek to return to this model and strengthen downtowns of all sizes through thoughtful housing development.</p> <p>Many cities can offer some zoning flexibility for designated properties. Some areas have building codes specifically for historic buildings, and the 2021 International Existing Building Code (IEBC) encourages the use and reuse of existing buildings.</p> <p>See examples on next page ></p>

Notes on Supporting Points

- “Affordable housing” is [generally defined](#) as housing (including utilities) that costs no more than 30% of a household’s gross income. It does not always mean subsidized housing.
- Existing, lower-cost, unsubsidized housing is also referred to as “[market rate-affordable](#)” (or market-affordable) and “[naturally occurring](#).”
- For more, see this [PastForward 2022 webinar](#), these [resources from the Preservation Priorities Task Force](#), and a [blog post by Bonnie McDonald](#) for The Relevancy Project.
- This messaging assumes a shared understanding of the need for affordable housing. To frame the need for affordable housing, see [resources from the FrameWorks Institute](#), including [a communications playbook](#).

Issue	Affordable Housing (contd.)
Examples	<p>Preserving existing affordable housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Preservation Compact's work in Chicago (they refer to "preservation" strictly as retention of existing housing) <p>Adding "missing middle" housing to older neighborhoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofit developer Restoration Housing is transforming vacant historic homes into affordable multifamily housing in Roanoke, VA. • Based on the "kit homes" popular a century ago, This Used to Be Normal: Pattern Book Homes for 21st Century offers free construction plans for compatible multifamily homes in Michigan, as well as tips for updating zoning codes to allow for more multifamily construction. <p>Converting old buildings (adaptive reuse)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "6 Examples of Affordable Housing through Adaptive Reuse," Jessica Powers, <i>gb&d magazine</i> • In 2022 alone, more than 14,000 housing units were completed using federal historic tax credits—nearly half of them for people with low and moderate incomes. • Nearly 40 states also have state historic tax credits, some of which add incentives for affordable housing. • Miami-Dade County is partnering with the Dade Heritage Trust on a new Historic Preservation Revolving Fund for Affordable Housing. • Successful projects abound, including the former Paris High School in Paris, IL; the Boyle Hotel in Los Angeles, CA; Minvilla Manor in Knoxville, TN; and Pancratia Hall Lofts in Denver, CO. • Underway as of June 2023: former high schools in Plattsmouth, NE and Globe, AZ.

<p>Issue</p>	<p>Density (some overlap with Affordable Housing)</p>
<p>Key Message</p>	<p>Communities seeking more density can add it in different ways, including with existing buildings. Higher density doesn't always mean high-rises. Reviving vacant and underused buildings, maintaining older multifamily housing, and adding compatible new construction in older neighborhoods can add density and vitality to a community while keeping what makes it unique.</p>
<p>Supporting Points</p>	<p>Older neighborhoods <u>often have higher density</u> than newer ones. The lots and units are typically smaller, and many have a mix of building types like duplexes, fourplexes, rowhouses, and courtyard apartments. They may also have low- to mid-rise buildings with mixed uses.</p> <p>Older commercial districts and urban neighborhoods already have not just buildings but infrastructure, walkability, and access to transit.</p> <p>Older residential neighborhoods can add density through compatible additions and new construction.</p> <p><u>Accessory dwelling units</u> (ADUs) increase the housing available on a single lot. Older houses are often smaller than newer ones, leaving more room on a lot for ADUs.</p> <p>Tools like <u>conservation districts</u> and <u>plan overlays</u> use zoning to help guide growth in older neighborhoods, agricultural areas, and other places while keeping their distinct culture and identity.</p> <p>As states and localities seek to promote density by reducing (or eliminating) single-family zoning, we can work to find common ground and accept the need to compromise. We can promote the use of new and existing "missing middle" housing, such as courtyard apartments and other low- and mid-rise buildings, as an alternative to outright opposition.</p> <p>See examples on next page ></p>

Issue	Density (contd.)
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the UpstairsDowntown™ program, the community of Rock Island, IL (scroll down) has completed more than a dozen major mixed-use projects since 2000, adding nearly 250 housing units and nearly 100,000 square feet of commercial space downtown. • Conservation districts in Topeka, KS; Bozeman, MT; Jefferson Parish, LA • Conservation zoning in rural areas: New Jersey; Pennsylvania • ADUs in a conservation overlay district in Denver • Little Havana: Me Importa, a proposed revitalization master plan for the historic Miami neighborhood, suggests specific ways—including “inverse density” (the smaller the lot, the more density allowed)—to build compatible infill. • Also see examples for “Affordable Housing” above.

<p>Issue</p>	<p>Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism</p>
<p>Key Message</p>	<p>Everyone’s history matters. But not everyone’s history is visible, and not everyone has access to it. Preservation policy and practice have contributed to these problems. As our work with historic places evolves, we’re doing more to amplify long-ignored stories, support residents’ efforts to revitalize long-excluded communities, make sure people can experience historic places, and change preservation policy and practice so that it works for everyone.</p>
<p>Supporting Points</p>	<p>By understanding how our community developed—including patterns of discrimination and injustice and implications of preservation policy—we can work to repair harm and restore justice to historically excluded communities, including [example: Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/e/x, Asian American, and LGBTQIA+ communities; women; people with disabilities; and people with low incomes].</p> <p>Historic preservation policy and practice have contributed to structural racism and injustice. We’re working to help people harmed by this injustice use preservation policy to elevate histories local government has helped to exclude, celebrate their cultures and contributions, and make our communities more equitable and resilient.</p> <p>The story of our community isn’t complete without the voices and places that White people and institutions, including local government, have ignored and erased. We’re working to conserve more places and tell fuller stories honoring the lives, experiences, and contributions of historically excluded residents including [example: Black, Indigenous, Latino/a/e/x, Asian American, and LGBTQIA+ communities; women; and people with disabilities].</p> <p>Expanding our view of designation and review criteria can serve historically excluded communities. For instance, we can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what a place means rather than just what it looks like, with less focus on physical integrity. • Prioritize access for people with disabilities over purely architectural concerns. • Use evidence like oral histories, a common tradition—and often the only option—in many immigrant communities.

<p>Issue</p>	<p>Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (contd.)</p>
<p>Supporting Points (contd.)</p>	<p>Co-creating policies and practices with historically excluded communities can help make sure people have preservation tools that work best for them. It can also improve decision-making about older and historic places by reflecting people’s needs from the start and encouraging ongoing involvement by the people most affected by these decisions.</p>
<p>Examples</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Localities Can Advance Racial Equity through Historic Preservation,” Sara Kaufman and Jean-Charles Zurawicki, <i>Housing Matters</i> • City of Santa Barbara African American and Black Historic Context Statement, pursued by Healing Justice Santa Barbara to prevent displacement of Black residents • City of Austin’s equity-based historic preservation plan update, led by a working group of community members • Customized design guidelines for Denver’s La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District, recognizing change over time • Japantown Cultural Heritage & Economic Sustainability Strategy, co-created by the San Francisco Planning Department, Office of Economic and Workforce Development, and Japantown community • Beyond Integrity coalition (supported by the cultural funding arm of Kings County, WA) advances preservation equity through research, strategy, and advocacy—including addressing cultural significance in designation criteria • Advisory Council on Historic Preservation’s Equity Action Plan to enhance its relevant expertise, expand its work to build a more inclusive national preservation program, advance its Native American Program, and help historically excluded communities participate in Section 106 process • For more, see this free NAPC webinar, “Preservation Justice: Making Your Local Government Preservation Program More Equitable.”

<p>Issue</p>	<p>Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (contd.)</p>
<p>About Gentrification</p>	<p>A common criticism of historic preservation is that it causes gentrification. This highly complex and hotly debated issue, and the endless amount of (often conflicting) information and opinions about it, make standard messaging difficult.</p> <p>However, these basic points might be helpful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though not the sole cause of gentrification and displacement, historic designation and preservation have played a role. • As our work evolves, we’re using preservation tools to help prevent displacement in ways including protecting affordable housing and supporting legacy businesses. • We can also support residents who are driving change and investment through community-based planning, resident-centered neighborhood revitalization*, and “withintrification.” • We do need to change some policies and practices so that preservation works for everyone. <p>Within the field, we can share knowledge, insights, and lessons learned to better understand preservation’s changing role in gentrification and how we can talk about it effectively.</p> <p>*For exciting new research on communicating resident-centered, place-based initiatives, we highly recommend Where We Thrive: Prosperity Starts with Place, from Purpose Built Communities and the FrameWorks Institute. Created primarily to address the roots of poverty, this great resource includes a communications toolkit with sample content that can translate very well to historic preservation.</p>

Issue	Health and Well-Being²
Message	Conserving historic places supports our health and well-being. From their human scale and walkability to the pride of place and sense of belonging they foster, older places and neighborhoods have a unique, vital effect on our lives.
Supporting Points	<p>Older places support our emotional and psychological health in many ways, both individually and socially.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We form strong emotional bonds with the places that helped shape us, or that provide the backdrop for our daily lives. • We take comfort in their familiarity. • Older and historic places offer stability in an ever-changing world, and they remind us that we're part of something bigger than ourselves. • People have a deep human need for connection. • Older places connect us with our past and each other. • Experiencing our shared heritage can benefit our community's well-being by fostering a sense of belonging, pride of place, and other benefits. • For more, see "Messaging: What Is Historic Preservation?" on page 31. <p>Older buildings and neighborhoods serve the needs of older Americans, from the human scale of older places to their walkability, access to services, and potential for co-living/shared housing options. This will only become more important as the population of older Americans increases.</p> <p>We can work to integrate the use of historic places into public health practice by promoting notions of culture as a health indicator, place as medicine, and preservation as a human right.</p>

² Thanks to peer reviewer Jeremy Wells for suggesting this section.

Issue	Health and Well-Being (contd.)
<p>Supporting Points (contd.)</p>	<p>Losing a place that’s important to us causes psychological harm. We lose a part of ourselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s your favorite old place in [city/town/region]? • Why? • How would you feel if it were gone tomorrow? (or) How did you feel when it was lost/demolished? <p>Displacement, disinvestment, and the full-scale destruction of neighborhoods cause trauma “similar to uprooted plants—a phenomenon psychiatrist and professor Dr. Mindy Thompson Fullilove calls ‘root shock.’” writes Rahkia Nance for <i>Ourselves Black</i>. “Victims of root shock, [Fullilove] said, are at ‘increased risk for stress-related diseases such as depression and heart attack.’”</p> <p>Like any building, older and historic places need proper maintenance to keep people safe and healthy. We can take a range of approaches to balancing conservation with people’s health and safety. We can’t (and shouldn’t) save everything. As we help to guide change and meet our community’s needs, we may lose some places we care about to ensure the health and safety of the people who occupy them.</p>
<p>Examples</p>	<p>You might find inspiration in these sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do about It, Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD • “Preservation as a Matter of Health.” Bonnie McDonald for The Relevancy Project, <i>Landmarks Illinois</i> blog • Preservation Maryland’s <i>PreserveCast</i> podcast: “People, Old Places, and Health” with Dr. Jeremy C. Wells, and “Preserving History, Promoting Health,” with Dr. Debarati Majumdar “Mimi” Narayan • “Why Do Old Places Matter?,” Thompson Mayes for the National Trust for Historic Preservation • The National Trust for Historic Preservation held an entire track on places and health at its 2017 PastForward conference (see selected videos here).

<p>Issue</p>	<p>Local Economy</p>
<p>Key Message</p>	<p>Conserving and reusing historic places strengthens the local economy. It revives commercial areas, multiplies the economic effects of investment, creates jobs, supports small businesses, stabilizes property values, conserves resources, and attracts visitors and events. History sells.</p>
<p>Supporting Points</p>	<p>Revitalizing historic places pays off long after construction ends, with ripple effects throughout the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic rehab projects often draw more investment and revitalization into the surrounding area. • Property owners gain a marketing edge—and often can charge a premium—based on a site’s unique features and stories. • As rehab projects create jobs and boost revenue, the economic impact multiplies as money circulates locally, creating a cycle of economic vitality. <p>Repairing, reusing, and renovating historic places keeps money in the local economy by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending more on labor than materials, compared to new construction • Using local labor and materials, as opposed to shipping in pre-made replacements (for windows, etc.) <p>Historic tax credits generate billions of dollars in investment through public-private partnerships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal historic tax credits spur billions in investment each year, in projects of all sizes. • Most states have their own historic tax credits that drive even more investment into communities and can be combined with federal, new-market, low-income, and other credits. • Historic tax credits attract investment in projects that might not happen otherwise. <p>Other incentives for historic buildings include targeted revitalization programs (e.g., for vacant buildings), programs to reduce property taxes, and preservation grants.</p> <p>The Main Street America program is one of the nation’s most powerful economic revitalization tools, for communities of all sizes.</p>

Issue	Local Economy (contd.)
<p>Supporting Points (contd.)</p>	<p>Rehabbing existing buildings supports the construction trades with specialized skills in areas like masonry, carpentry, and electrical work, creating higher-paying jobs than those in new construction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic rehab projects create more than 165,000 jobs each year, 60% of which require skills and experience with traditional construction methods and materials. • With a nationwide shortage of people skilled in preservation trades, training programs across the country are helping to rebuild the workforce. <p>Legacy business programs support longtime, locally owned businesses, the backbone of neighborhood economies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services range from promotional help to grants and training. • The programs help hardworking business owners, many in immigrant communities, earn a living while providing goods and services, local jobs, and anchors of culture and community. <p>In 2022, the American Institute of Architects reported that billings for work on existing buildings outpaced those for new construction for the first time in more than twenty years. Firms cited adaptive reuse as the top goal of their reconstruction work over the past year.</p> <p>Homes in locally designated historic districts tend to have more stable property values over time and weather market fluctuations, helping to protect what is typically people’s largest financial asset.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owners have some certainty that neighboring properties will remain compatible, even with new construction. • This stability doesn’t just benefit wealthy homeowners: A 2020 study of Los Angeles, for instance, found local historic districts to be more ethnically, racially, and income diverse than the rest of the city as a whole. <p>Heritage (or cultural) tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural/heritage tourists tend to stay longer, spend more, and travel more often than other tourists. • In addition to having interesting places to visit, tourists often prefer staying in hotels with a history of their own. <p>See examples on next page ></p>

Issue	Local Economy (contd.)
Examples	<p>Rehab projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The former mining town of Globe, AZ used its historic downtown to revitalize the community. • The revitalization of the Owyhee Hotel in Boise, ID attracted more than \$100 million in nearby investment. • A former livery stable in South Providence, RI now houses farm-to-market activity and the Southside Community Land Trust. • The Winnett ACES (Agricultural Community Enhancement and Sustainability) in central Montana helps revitalize buildings like the former courthouse and Odd Fellows Hall. • See more examples in Twenty-Four Reasons Historic Preservation Is Good for Your Community, by PlaceEconomics. <p>Tax credits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See federal tax credit info for your state here. • See state tax credit info here. • In 2022, the federal historic tax credit leveraged over \$6.5 billion in private investment in historic preservation and community revitalization nationwide. • More than half the federal historic tax credit projects completed in 2022 had relatively small budgets, with qualified expenses of less than \$1 million and even less than \$250,000. • Nearly 40 states have state-level historic tax credits that drive even more private investment into communities. <p>Main Street America</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2022, 1,200 older commercial districts nationwide reinvested \$6.25 billion, rehabbed nearly 11,000 buildings, created nearly 30,000 jobs, and started more than 7,600 businesses. • Every dollar spent on a Main Street program spurred reinvestment of more than \$24. <p>Heritage tourism (your local/state tourism agency might have data)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maryland Heritage Areas Program Economic Contribution Analysis, 2020 • The Economic Impact of Heritage Tourism in Virginia, 2017

<p>Issue</p>	<p>Sustainability and Climate Change</p>
<p>Key Messages</p>	<p>Reusing buildings, and making them more energy efficient, plays an essential role in saving the planet/fighting climate change.</p> <p>Reusing buildings—and making them more energy efficient—plays an essential role in meeting our community’s goals for sustainability, resilience, and climate action.</p> <p>Reduce, reuse, recycle, repair: Conserving buildings does all four. It reduces greenhouse gases, reuses what we already have, and recycles and repairs materials to keep them out of landfills.</p> <p>Preservation is conservation. It focuses more on the built environment than the natural environment, although it often includes both.</p>
<p>Supporting Points</p>	<p>Reusing buildings reduces the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change stems largely from the <u>high concentration of greenhouse gases</u> in the atmosphere, which warms the planet—damaging crops; harming wildlife and sealife; increasing sea levels; and making fires, floods, droughts, and hurricanes more destructive. • Of all the greenhouse gases generated by people, <u>carbon dioxide accounts for about 75 percent</u>. • Each year, worldwide, creating and operating buildings <u>generates almost 40 percent of these carbon emissions</u>. • Reusing existing buildings greatly reduces these gases by keeping many tons of material out of landfills and reducing the need for new construction (which typically <u>generates far more carbon emissions</u> than conservation and reuse). • New tools can <u>help people estimate the environmental costs</u> of reusing versus replacing a building.

Issue	Sustainability and Climate Change (contd.)
<p>Supporting Points (contd.)</p>	<p>Preservation and other tools can maintain the natural energy efficiency of some older buildings and increase it in others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many older structures—especially those built before World War II—are naturally energy efficient, with built-in ventilation, thick walls, natural light, and other features common before mechanical heat and cooling systems. • Some older buildings aren’t as energy efficient, and all buildings need upgrades over time. As preservation professionals, we understand how the design and materials of older buildings affect energy efficiency. We also know how to maintain and enhance efficiency in a way that’s safe and compatible for older places. • Coordinating energy upgrades with renovation or adaptive reuse can greatly reduce the time and cost involved. • Many cities offer design guidelines, other guidance, and even grants to make older and historic properties more energy efficient (e.g., through window repair and weatherization). Some programs might apply to locally designated places; others apply to any older properties, perhaps based on the income of owners. <p>When a building or other structure can’t be saved, deconstruction salvages materials like old-growth wood for reuse—keeping these materials out of landfills, conserving precious resources, and reducing the need for new materials in the projects that use them.</p> <p>Preservation tools can help people and places adapt to the increasing effects of climate change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many local and national preservation standards specifically address adapting historic buildings to minimize risks associated with fires, floods, hurricanes, and sea-level rise. • Organizations worldwide offer networks and resources to help cities, towns, and rural communities increase their resilience.

Issue	Sustainability and Climate Change (contd.)
Examples	<p>Reducing greenhouse gases: Architecture 2030's Carbon Avoided Retrofit Estimator (CARE) Tool (and CARE Tool webinar with the National Trust for Historic Preservation)</p> <p>Increasing energy efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salem, MA Historical Commission Guidelines • Historic Buildings' Path to Net Zero Energy, City of Burlington, VT • Assistance programs in Phoenix and Philadelphia • Study of programs to make existing affordable housing more energy efficient in Wilmington, DE and Dane County, WI • National Park Service guidance on weatherizing, solar panels, and green roofs on historic buildings <p>Deconstruction programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boston, MA • Hennepin County, MN (reuse grants) • Milwaukee, WI • Pittsburgh, PA • Portland, OR • San Antonio, TX <p>Adapting to the effects of climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather It Together, City of Annapolis, MD • Keeping History Above Water, Newport Restoration Foundation • San Rafael, CA Fire Department fuel reduction project targeting historic sites • Boston Resilient, Historic Buildings Design Guide • Climate action plans: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; Climate Heritage Network; National Park Service <p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability and Climate Action Issue Brief and other resources, Preservation Priorities Task Force • PastForward conference webinars from 2022 and 2021, National Trust for Historic Preservation

How Local Preservation Works

Every local preservation program is different. Unless you're just starting your program, you already have information about processes like designation and design review. But if you don't, or if you'd like to make it clearer, this section offers tips and sample text.

It might help to keep these general themes in mind:

- **Change:** You're here to help people make changes, not stop them.
- **Transparency:** Understanding the process lowers stress and manages expectations.
- **Purpose:** There's usually a reason for something you're asking for; connect "what" with "why."

While your program likely does many different things, this section focuses on design review, the process most commonly cited as a challenge by NAPC members in our research for this guide. You might find some of the concepts helpful in communicating about other aspects of your program.

This section includes:

- A sample overview of a local preservation program
- A sample overview of the design review process
- Tips on having productive conversations about design review
- A few examples of ways to visually depict the design review process

The sample text includes things your program might not do, and it might not include everything your program does. It also includes brackets for customizable terms, like "[city/state/region]" or "[name of form]." Please use whatever text works for you, change it as needed, and ignore the rest.

Sample Text: Your Local Preservation Program

As part of [city/town/area]'s environment, older and historic places play different roles in our daily lives. The [name of office/program] helps people care for and celebrate these places.

Who We Are

[ideally with a picture of smiling staff/commissioners]

The [name of office/program] is in the [city/town/area]'s [department]. We have [number] professional staff and a [name of commission/board], [number] residents with expertise in working with older and historic places. The [commissioners/board members] volunteer their time as a public service.

Staff

[names/titles/contact info, maybe photo(s)]

[Commissioners/Board Members]

[names/professional titles]

What We Do

Designation

- We help people recognize places they care about by coordinating the designation of local landmarks.
- We help residents balance change with stability in their neighborhoods through the designation of local historic districts and [name of conservation districts or other overlays].

Stewardship and Community Development

- We help people maintain, repair, and update historic properties by providing information, advice, and design review services.
- We help residents of historic districts with ongoing stewardship through regular meetings, training, and other assistance.
- We help property owners and developers adapt old buildings for new uses, make compatible additions, and integrate new construction.
- We maintain and update local preservation policies, including working to make them more equitable and inclusive.

Education and Engagement

- We share information about our historic environment through publications, workshops, presentations, and community meetings.
- We work on special projects to share our community's stories, such as heritage markers, online story maps, and trails.
- We encourage and support residents' active involvement in preserving the places they care about.

We can help you if:

- You own or are considering buying a designated local landmark or a home, commercial building, or other place in a locally designated historic district.
- You are a contractor, architect, designer, or other professional who works with owners of historic properties on maintenance, upgrades, and/or renovations.
- You are interested in local designation for your property or neighborhood.
- You think you might own a historic property or live in a historic district but aren't sure.
- Your history has been excluded from our community's story by past planning, preservation, and design efforts.
- You want to revitalize and/or celebrate your neighborhood using places you care about.
- You might want to serve your community as a volunteer member of the [local preservation commission/board].
- You want to participate in other efforts involving places you care about.

How to Reach Us

If you'd like to learn more, please contact our office at [contact info]. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sample Text: Design Review Overview

Historic places change all the time. We help guide these changes with a [design review] process using flexible, established guidelines.

Just like clearance for electrical, mechanical, and other work that requires a building permit, you'll also need clearance for work on certain historic features of your property if:

- It's a designated local landmark [if called something else, add "known as a [name]"].
- It's identified as a "contributing structure" [or another name] in a locally designated historic district.
- It's identified as a "non-contributing structure" [or another name] in a locally designated historic district, and you want to [demolish it, etc.].
- [any other classification(s) for design review].

We review certain types of work on these properties to make sure it's compatible based on professional, established standards for historic places.

[Design review]:

- **Works like other types of zoning review**, as well as review by homeowners associations (which can be much stricter than our review).
- **Works best the sooner we're involved.** We know the ins and outs of the process and how it relates to the other clearance(s) you need. We can help you avoid frustration, delays, and perhaps costly revisions by working with you from the beginning.
- **Can be quick.** We approve many changes in a few days, or in a single meeting with the [commission/board].
- **Uses professional standards.** Our design guidelines were developed [if true, add "with community input,"] based on established standards for treating historic properties.
- **Uses flexible guidelines.** We created the design guidelines to give you and your team as much flexibility as possible.
- **Is tailored to your needs.** Each project is different, so we work case by case to understand your needs, explore options, and make the process as smooth as possible.
- **It works!** With or without changes, we approve the vast majority of applications we receive—typically [number]%.

The best way to make [design review] as smooth as possible is to contact us before you start planning your project. You can reach us at [contact info]. We look forward to working with you.

Sample Text: How Design Review Works

Here's a broad overview of our design review process, just for a sense of what to expect. The process typically moves fairly quickly—we can often approve your project in a few days, or in a single meeting with the [board/commission].

1. **As early as possible, contact us** to discuss your needs, go over the process in more detail, and explore options. Meeting with us before you start planning will help the process run smoothly and avoid potential costly, time-consuming revisions. You might not even need us to review the project, depending on the work you want to do—for details, see our [guidelines/matrix/flow chart]. You can reach us at [contact info].

Application

2. If we do need to review the project, share the design guidelines (and any other relevant info from our meeting) with your architect, contractor, and/or other members of your project team. We're happy to talk with them, too. With everyone on the same page, you'll be able to plan the project from the beginning in a way that will take less time and effort to approve.
3. Complete the [application] and submit it, with all requested materials, to our office. A staff member will check the application for completion, to make sure we have all we need to understand the project and review the application. We'll contact you if we need any more information.

Staff Review

4. Once the application is complete, a staff member will review it to determine if the work clearly keeps what makes the property meaningful to the community (for example, minor maintenance or repair using the same materials, minor work not visible to the public, and/or changes that clearly meet the design guidelines).
5. If the work clearly meets the guidelines, the staff member will approve your application and outline next steps in the process (e.g., coordinating the approval with your building permit application).

Commission Review

6. If the work is substantive and/or doesn't meet the guidelines (for example, changing original features, a new addition, or demolition), we'll send the application and materials to the [commission/design review board], a small group of volunteer residents or experts with relevant knowledge, skills, and/or experience.
7. The [commissioners/design review board members] will review your project, using the design guidelines, and discuss it at a public [meeting/hearing]. The [meeting/hearing] is open to the public for transparency and to encourage participation in the process. We'll let you know about the [meeting/hearing] and ask you to attend, to answer any questions the [commission/design review board] may have.
8. At the [meeting/hearing], the [commissioners/design review board members] will discuss the project, address any issues or concerns, ask you any questions they may have, and explore creative solutions if needed.

Commission Decision

9. The [commission/design review board] will make a decision based on the guidelines and conversation. They will decide to [options, e.g., approve, approve with conditions, deny, or defer (if they need more information in order to decide)].
10. Based on the [commission/design review board]'s decision, staff will advise you on next steps and help as much as we can.
11. After the [commission/design review board] approves your application, we will give you the [certificate/approval] so you can [start work/move forward with your plans/continue the process/other next step].

To get started, please contact us at [contact info]. We look forward to working with you.

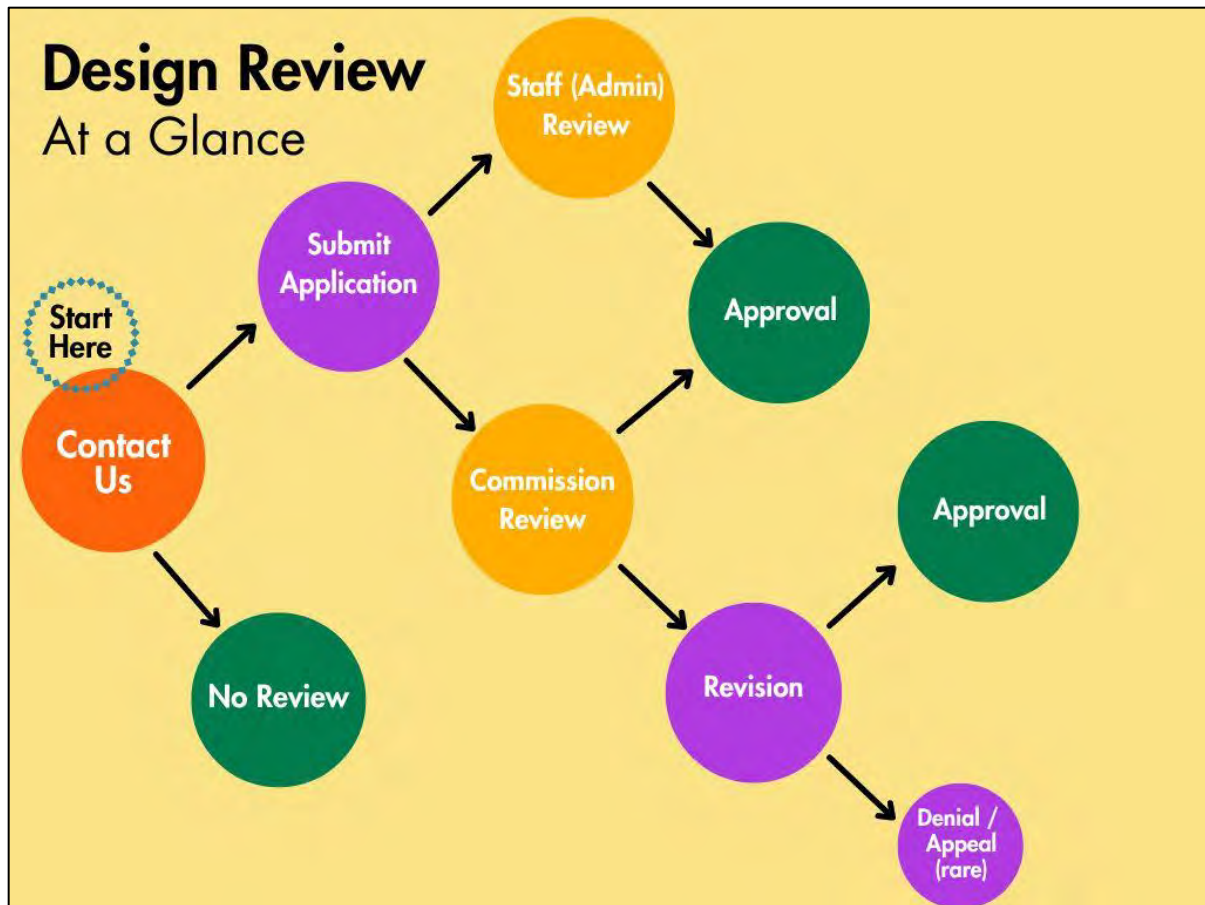
Sample Graphic: Do You Need Design Review?

To customize this graphic, [copy the template in Canva](#) (free account required).



Sample Graphic: Design Review at a Glance

To customize this graphic, [copy the template in Canva](#) (free account required).



More Examples

- [Certificate of Appropriateness timeline](#), City of Muncie, IN
- [Certificate of Appropriateness flow chart](#), City of Bloomington, IN
- [Detailed flow charts](#) (p. 262/255 in footer) and [matrix of staff vs. board review](#) (p. 266/259 in footer), Miami-Dade County

Tips: Discussing Design Review

A process like design review is the perfect place to convey your role as a facilitator, not a regulator. With clarity and empathy, you can foster constructive dialogue that makes the process better for everyone. The following tips come largely from this guide's peer reviewers (thank you!).

Help People Prepare

How can you help people understand the basics of design review before they even contact you? For example:

- Make sure your website has a clear overview of the process, including a general timeline.
- Distinguish which guidelines/steps are required versus recommended.
- Note where design review fits into the overall permitting process.
- Offer tips on finding and choosing the right architect, designer, or contractor.

Explain Why, from the Start

Assure people that there's a reason behind what you're asking them to do—if it's in their own interest, all the better. For example, you ask someone to follow design guidelines to make sure their project meets the same standards we ask of everyone. As a benefit, following the guidelines can:

- Help to ensure approval/faster approval (e.g., staff/administrative approval; placement on the consent agenda at the commission meeting/hearing)
- Help the process run smoothly
- Help avoid costly delays

Say Yes When You Can

Whenever possible, find a way to say **yes** or **yes, if ...** Start with what people can (or might be able to) do, even if it's minor, to emphasize that you're here to help.

Show How It Works

Share examples of approved projects and plans, to show the range of possibilities.

Stick to the Guidelines

Many people think design review requirements and decisions are arbitrary or based on personal preference. You can assure them otherwise and foster constructive dialogue by:

- Introducing your design standards/guidelines as professionally established criteria, based on nationally used standards, and created for consistent reference by property owners, designers, preservation staff, and commissioners. If the guidelines were developed with community input, all the better!

- Discussing proposed changes solely in terms of the standards/guidelines, referring to them early and often.
- Steering clear of subjective terms and personal opinion—rather than saying you like or don't like an aspect of the project, you can say you appreciate it or don't understand it, for example.

Start with the Good News

When providing feedback, start on a positive note—for example:

- Start with a positive remark and support for the project's goal.
- Then discuss what works with the design, referring to the design standards or guidelines.
- Segue to what needs to be modified to meet the standards/guidelines, again referring to them.
- Provide and discuss options that meet both the project goals and the relevant standards/guidelines.

Admit Reality

Let's face it: Sometimes a policy or process just doesn't make sense, or you won't be able to help someone as much as you'd like. In those cases, you can just acknowledge the frustration and accept constructive criticism. One of the best tools you have is empathy.

You can break down barriers and create a human connection simply by acknowledging the fact of the matter, whether it's the burden of extra time or cost, a process that doesn't make sense, or the limits of what you can do to help. You can respond with, for instance:

- "I understand your frustration."
- "We wish we could do more, and we're working on it [if that's the case]."



I found I was able to earn the trust of folks much better when I could acknowledge something in our code didn't make sense, listen to their opinions, and take it into account for future policy changes.

— **Adrienne Burke**, AICP, Esq. (she/her),
Principal, Community Planning Collaborative,
Jacksonville, FL (and NAPC CAMP Trainer)

Responding to Concerns About the Process

Below, we suggest responses to common concerns about the local preservation process. Use just the responses—don't repeat the original concerns or publish these as "myths/facts," which can backfire (see "[Myths: Replace, Don't Repeat](#)" on page 12).

Concern	Potential Response
<p>Cost of maintenance and repairs</p>	<p>Ongoing maintenance really makes a difference in the long run. Touching up paint or replacing a few roof tiles every year will be far less expensive than waiting until you have to repaint everything or replace the whole roof.</p> <p>If you can afford it, it's an investment that pays off in the long run. High-quality materials last longer (and will add resale value if you ever sell), and qualified craftsmanship makes all the difference in how long the materials last. While all materials need maintenance, historic materials (especially in pre-World War II buildings) can generally allow for more repairs and last longer.</p> <p>If spending more for higher-quality replacement materials isn't possible, we might be able to help you find incentives such as low-interest loans or grants.</p> <p>Many cities/towns/areas have programs to help people manage the cost of maintenance or rehab, including (among many examples) dozens of communities in Ohio who participate in the Cleveland Restoration Society's Heritage Home Program.</p>
<p>Unclear about why preservation matters</p>	<p>See "Messaging: Why Preservation Matters" on page 33.</p>

Responding to Concerns About the Process (contd.)

Concern	Potential Response
<p>The extra time it takes</p>	<p>Design review does add a step to the other clearances you need for your project. We're here to help make this part of the process as smooth as possible for you.</p> <p>We coordinate different steps when we can, and we can also coordinate with your team (contractor, architect, permit expeditor, etc.).</p> <p>We approve projects fairly quickly, often within a few days or at a single meeting. If the commission needs to review the project, following the design guidelines could get your application on the consent agenda, for quick approval at the start of the meeting.</p> <p>We coordinate multiple reviews when possible so they can take place at the same time. Once we've approved the project, we coordinate directly with our permitting office to get you on your way.</p> <p>We have this process down. The earlier we're involved, the better. If you contact us before you start planning, your application has a better chance of being approved faster.</p>
<p>Preference for new materials</p>	<p>In many cases, maintaining and repairing original materials is more cost-effective in the long run because they last longer. If original materials aren't available, we can help you find compatible modern alternatives that work best for your specific project.</p> <p>New materials generally cost more upfront—for instance, if you have a house completely resided. That's a significant investment. With a maintenance-based use of materials, the historic elements can last longer. And yes, sometimes we consider new materials!</p>

Responding to Concerns About the Process (contd.)

Concern	Potential Response
<p>Already takes care of their property</p>	<p>Your stewardship is so important! We appreciate the investment you're making in your historic property. Design review is just to help keep what makes it meaningful to the community and to future stewards. We're here to help make the process as smooth as possible for you.</p> <p>Design review applies to everyone in your [district/area if relevant].</p> <p>Design review for historic properties is often less strict than it is for homeowners associations in newer neighborhoods.</p>
<p>Didn't know/thought they were doing the right thing</p>	<p>I understand. It can be hard to keep up with all the details. Let's see what we can do. We welcome your ideas on how we can make sure owners are aware in the future.</p>
<p>Infringement on property rights</p>	<p>Design review might be lesser known than other policies, but it's just another part of planning and zoning. You can't open a restaurant in your house, say, or rewire it yourself without a permit and inspection to make sure it's safe.</p> <p>Preservation balances private and public interests. There's a long-held recognition in the U.S. that certain places benefit the whole community and deserve protection, even when they're privately owned. That's why we're here to offer guidance, information about any incentives you might be able to use, and advice to make the process as smooth as possible.</p> <p>[Mention where your local program affords flexibility and freedom, e.g., "Feel free to build the addition/make the alterations at the rear, where only you will see them."]</p>

Responding to Concerns About the Process (contd.)

Concern	Potential Response
<p>Inconsistency (e.g., neighbor did similar work without design review)</p>	<p>It could've happened for any of several reasons. Every building is different; what works for one might not work for another.</p> <p>Your neighbor's work might've been done before [the district was designated/design guidelines were developed/updated], or it might have been done without a permit.</p> <p>As part of the overall planning process, preservation enforcement works the same as it does with other building and zoning codes. [depending on enforcement in your community:] I could look into it for you, but you might need to get involved (file a complaint, etc.).</p>
<p>Reluctance to use standards/guidelines</p>	<p>The design guidelines help you plan your project from the beginning in a way that will take less time and effort to approve. They're created to offer you as much flexibility as possible, as well as to help everyone involved, from the owner to the contractor.</p> <p>We're happy to meet with you at any point in the project, including the pre-planning phase. The earlier the better. We can talk about the guidelines as they relate specifically to your project to help you plan for success from the start.</p>
<p>Confusion over guidelines</p>	<p>I'm sorry they were confusing. I'll answer any questions you have, and I'd appreciate your suggestions for making them clearer.</p>

Responding to Concerns About the Process (contd.)

Concern	Potential Response
Perception of arbitrary decision making	<p>We use established design guidelines based on both nationwide standards and [if true] the specific needs of the community. The guidelines provide a common reference point for property owners, designers, staff, and commissioners, so we all know what's expected. [if true:] We even have the commission/city attorney attend our public meetings to make sure we're all following the guidelines.</p>
Perception that their work won't be approved	<p>We want your project to succeed, and we'll help you as much as we can. We approve the vast majority of applications we receive—with or without changes, we approve about [number]% of them.</p> <p>We approve many of them at the staff level, without taking them to the commission. We can also approve changes pretty quickly—often in a few days, or in a single meeting with the commission (maybe on the consent agenda at the beginning of the meeting/hearing).</p> <p>The best way to help make sure your project is approved is to follow the design guidelines. We're here to help.</p>
Can't find anyone qualified to do the work	<p>I understand. We have a major shortage of skilled craftspeople across the country.</p> <p>You could try these sources/We can connect you with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofits or state offices that maintain lists of preservation professionals and tradespeople • Historic homeowner fairs where you can meet craftspeople • DIY training for repairing windows and other work • Trades training programs that might be able to connect you with recent graduates

About This Project

The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) created this guide to help local preservation programs communicate more effectively. Like many fields, historic preservation is filled with jargon and complexity. As a whole, the field has yet to translate its work into clear, cohesive messages that connect effectively with different audiences.

The stakes are particularly high for local preservation programs, given their integral role in the care, protection, and revitalization of the places that define communities across the U.S. NAPC sought to provide members with easy-to-use language and tips to help address the most important issues they face.

Working with preservation communications consultant Cindy Olnick, NAPC launched this project at the 2022 FORUM conference in Cincinnati. Cindy gathered input from FORUM guests at a table in the conference lobby and in a session, “We Need to Talk: What Issues Matter Most to You?”

Dozens of issues emerged, ranging from capacity, compliance, and construction costs to the loss of zoning control; a lack of internal trust and support; and the need for diversity, equity, inclusion, and other systemic changes in the field. Cindy analyzed the comments, grouped them into nine broader themes, and asked NAPC members and FORUM attendees to prioritize them using an online survey.

More than 260 people completed the survey, offering more than 900 comments. Regardless of how we asked the question, respondents consistently cited three issues as most important:

- Conveying the value of preservation
- Explaining the local preservation process
- Advocating for more effective preservation policies and practices (or more effective implementation of existing ones)

Cindy and the Project Advisory Committee shared the research with the NAPC Board of Directors in the fall. Cindy worked with the committee to develop and refine the draft, then had it peer reviewed by dozens of volunteer colleagues nationwide. Many thanks to everyone who offered their valuable time and insight.

Several revisions later, NAPC launched the guide in July 2023 for use by local preservation programs, and anyone else, nationwide.

About NAPC

The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) helps to build strong local preservation programs and leaders through education, training, and advocacy. It was founded in 1983 in response to amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

These amendments provided financial assistance to local governments that met requirements of the Certified Local Government program, including the establishment of a local preservation ordinance and commission. NAPC was formed to provide a forum for commissions to discuss mutual problems and to serve as a national voice representing the particular needs of commissions.

NAPC provides technical support and manages an information network to help local commissions accomplish their preservation objectives. Our established education and training programs, including our biennial FORUM conference and Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program (CAMP®), have provided essential training to thousands of commission members and staff.

NAPC also serves as an advocate at federal, state, and local levels of government to promote policies and programs that support preservation commission efforts, thanks in part to collaboration with our partner organizations in Washington, D.C.

For more information, visit napcommissions.org.

Resources

Just a few sources of relevant information and inspiration.
If a link is broken, try copying and pasting the title into a search engine.

NAPC Programs

[NAPC-L listserv](#)

[Resources](#) including Design Guidelines, Preservation Plans, Technical Assistance, Professional Network Directory, and Cultural Resource Survey Tool

[Webinar Series](#) — key sources for this guide; two recordings available for free:

- [“Community Outreach Strategies for Historic Preservation Commissions and Boards”](#)
- [“Preservation Justice: Making Your Preservation Program More Equitable”](#)

[FORUM Conference](#)

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[Conscious Style Guide](#)

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[FrameWorks Institute](#) and [Hattaway Communications](#) (social science-based)

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[Radical Copyeditor](#) (equity-based)

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[TheCaseMade](#) (social science- and community-based)

[Where We Thrive Toolkit](#) for communicating resident-centered neighborhood revitalization

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Messaging Guide for Local Preservation Programs

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