

How a Florida CLG Uses the National Register

During the 1960s, urban renewal and the effects of the 1956 Interstate Highway Act leveled major swaths of communities across the nation, and Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, providing for the National Register of Historic Places. Under the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, state historic preservation officers take the lead for state preservation efforts and coordinate nominations of properties for listing in the National Register, the official federal list of properties significant in local, state, and national history and culture. For the first time, a federal program recognized the importance of historic resources for regional, state, and local significance. In Florida, nearly 1,400 listings out of about 74,000 nationwide record significant local historical resources. The Register is a valuable planning tool available to planners and developers, local governments and public officials.

The fourth largest state in the nation, Florida's local and state governments are vital to preserving the state's "sense of place." The impact of preservation is not just visual, but also reflects the hearts of our communities. Often National Register nominations produce the only written histories of a place. A Florida teacher from Century in Escambia County remarked following the designation of a National Register district in her small, rural community, "Now we can tell our children why we are here."

Since 1977, Florida's local preservation efforts have been supported by state statute (Chapter 163, F.S.) requiring comprehensive plans by local governments consistent with the overall state comprehensive plan. Many communities go further by creating optional preservation elements and establishing preservation ordinances and historic preservation boards, while some employ local tax benefits.

In 1980, amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act provided for direct participation by local governments through the Certified Local Government (CLG) Program. Communities qualify for CLG designation by adopting an approved local historic preservation ordinance and establishing a local review commission. CLGs conduct ongoing surveys to identify resources, provide adequate public participation, and partner with state and federal programs. In 1986, Miami, St. Petersburg, and St. Augustine became Florida's first CLGs. Today, 45 CLGs (about 10% of the state's incorporated communities) include diverse communities from Jacksonville to Eatonville and from Miami to Micanopy. St. Petersburg, one of the larger west central Florida urban centers organized in the railroad and land development booms of the 1880s, eventually established a unique "sense of place." Recognition of that significance today and its role in maintaining livable communities is part of the following CLG story contributed by planner Rick Smith and Bob Jeffrey of St. Petersburg's Urban Design and Historic Preservation program.

Janet Snyder Matthews

Founded in 1888, St. Petersburg has a relatively short but distinctive history that parallels the development and growth of Florida during the 20th century. Developers flocked to the area during the land booms of the 1910s and 1920s, creating vast neighborhoods with high concentrations of Craftsman, Mediterranean Revival, and other architectural styles. To preserve this rich heritage, St. Petersburg developed a local historic preservation program in 1986, and through the years has honored its history by locally designating more than 70 historic properties. However, despite the effort of the city and dedicated preservationists, the general citizenry has often become

disillusioned with historic preservation when the battle is joined on contentious issues. To build a bigger constituency for historic preservation, while minimizing the political controversy surrounding local designation, the city is promoting National Register historic district nominations. Presently, only one city neighborhood is designated, a deficit soon to be overcome as four neighborhoods, collectively numbering more than 6,000 structures, are being nominated.

One such neighborhood is Historic Kenwood, a fashionable address from the 1920s to the 1960s featuring Craftsman, Tudor, and vernacular bungalows. By 1980, however, the neighborhood was deteriorating with most of its

Typical houses
in the
Kenwood
neighborhood.



1,200 homes owned by absentee landlords. By 1990, residents were fed up and began taking back the neighborhood, focusing on the issues of crime and code enforcement. These activists quickly realized, though, that the only way to save the neighborhood was to educate existing residents on the neighborhood's historic significance and attract new homeowners who wanted to preserve it.

Historic Kenwood considered local landmark designation, but lacking political support turned to National Register district designation as a burden-free way to promote historic preservation. Nevertheless, the neighborhood still needed to convince skeptical residents of the benefits of designation, as well as raise funds to hire a historic preservation consultant to aid in surveying and documenting the area. To energize residents, the neighborhood applied for city grants to install decorative neighborhood signs on every street corner. This spurred interest and neighborhood meetings soon focused on architecture, preservation, appropriate construction, and the benefits of historic designation. In addition, homeownership rates doubled during the 1990s, restoration began, and the neighborhood improved, eliminating most absentee landlords.

However, progress was still slow. The neighborhood needed a more intensive marketing effort

to raise money for the preservation consultant, and thus began "BungalowFest," Historic Kenwood's annual home tour, which first attracted more than 1,600 people, and has been a rousing success ever since! Almost all homes listed for sale since that initial tour have been sold to preservation-minded owners, many attracted to the neighborhood during BungalowFest. These new owners are re-opening porches, returning the original siding, and removing jalousie windows. Historic Kenwood is quickly regaining its original look.

While the first two BungalowFests generated a portion of the funds, Historic Kenwood was well short of its financial target when the city offered to evenly share costs with it on a state grant-in-aid application if the neighborhood could contribute one-third of the target amount. The neighborhood jumped at the opportunity and voted unanimously to participate with the city in this collaborative effort, which was rewarded in December 2000, when the state's Bureau of Historic Preservation approved the grant request.

Historic Kenwood's experience provides a hopeful conclusion to what otherwise might have been a controversial issue. Those who work with the neighborhoods know every time a discussion of historic designation arises, people come out fighting. Over the past six years, Historic Kenwood has held numerous meetings discussing National Register designation. At the last two neighborhood-wide meetings, the vote was unanimous to seek designation and the only dissenting comment was by a puzzled individual who declared, "I thought we were already historic."

Janet Snyder Matthews, Ph.D., is Director of the Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, and State Historic Preservation Officer. A historian and an author, she chaired the Florida National Register Review Board and is an emeritus member of the Board of Advisors, National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Bob Jeffrey has worked in the field of architecture, historic preservation and development for 20 years from both the regulatory and development sides. As a regulator he oversees the city's Urban Design and Historic Preservation programs. As a developer he has concentrated his efforts in Historic Kenwood, renovating 1920s-era houses and multi-family and commercial buildings.

Rick D. Smith, AICP, is the historic preservation planner for the City of St. Petersburg. He has masters degrees in urban planning and American history, and has been a practicing planner for 12 years in Virginia and Florida.

Photos by Susan Hochberg Daniel, Janus Research, St. Petersburg, Florida.