

Partnerships in Community Preservation

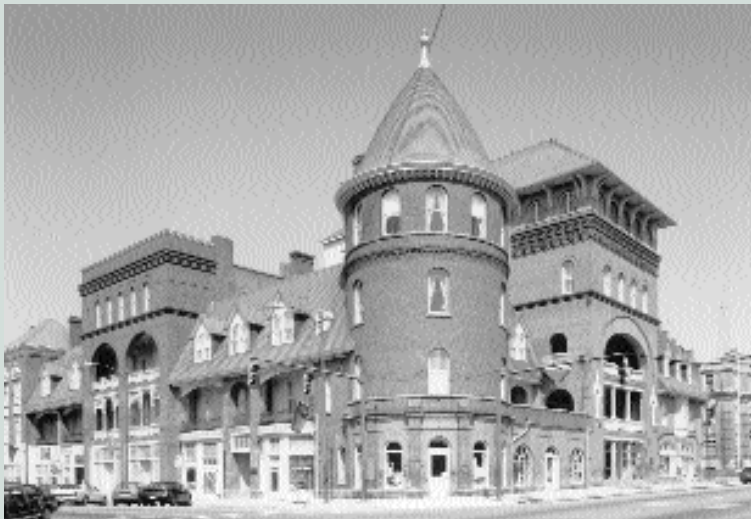
In September 1991, in Americus, Georgia, dignitaries from across the state joined local leaders in a round of parties and celebrations. The Windsor Hotel (1892), a major and highly visible community landmark, had re-opened in the center of a revitalized downtown after almost 20 years of effort. A few years later across the country in the International Historic District of Seattle, Washington, city officials, community organizations, and architects crowded into the North Pacific Hotel Lobby to celebrate its reopening after 22 years. About the same time in Cumberland, Maryland, a group of state and local leaders gathered by the Western Maryland Railroad Station at the newly developed Station Square Plaza near the terminus of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal to celebrate a new beginning in heritage tourism.

On such occasions, it is easy to recognize the physical evidence of historic preservation: long neglected buildings put back into use, a lively and rehabilitated historic downtown, and the showcasing of opportunities for tourism and economic development. In the euphoria of success, it is all too easy to forget the long years of effort and to overlook the complex system of partnerships that created the environment in which these events took place. Yet, the relationships that have grown from the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act are visible when the process is examined in these communities.

The Windsor Hotel, Americus, Georgia

The effort to save the Windsor in Americus date back to 1975, when after some years of decline, the grand old hotel closed. About the same time, the Sumter County Preservation Society assisted the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with the survey and research necessary to nominate a large historic district that included the Windsor, and the historic core of downtown around it, to the National Register of Historic Places. Its Florida owners gave the Windsor to the city in 1978. Soon after, the city began the long struggle to find funds and a use for the huge structure. Two SHPO programs began a process of collaboration that continues today. The first of the state's regional preservation planning programs was established here. The planner helped the city secure two grants, one for a feasibility study and the other, a small rehabilitation grant to begin the stabilization of the building. The feasibility study and the technical assistance of the regional planner served as the basis for the redevelopment plans.

In 1983, Americus became one of Georgia's first Main Street cities, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. A team of professionals advised the community to secure and protect the Windsor, but to concentrate first on the business district around it. A low-interest loan pool and facade grant program using both federal and local funds and the federal preservation tax incentives assisted with the rehabilitation of many downtown buildings. These projects involved



The dominant Windsor Hotel in Americus, GA, was rehabilitated and reopened in 1991. Listing in the National Register of Historic Places, SHPO technical assistance, the Federal Preservation Tax Incentives, and the Main Street program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation contributed to the success of the project. Today, the building houses a hotel, retail businesses, a senior citizen's center, and a corporate headquarters. The rehabilitation served as a catalyst for the rehabilitation of surrounding historic buildings in the city's commercial district. Photo by James Lockhart, courtesy Georgia Historic Preservation Division.

reviews, technical assistance, and field visits by SHPO staff. The statewide non-profit, the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, provided design assistance to property owners. Periodic inspections by the National Park Service (NPS) helped to assure that required standards were met. During this period the city also took advantage of several federal funding sources to continue work on the Windsor. An Emergency Jobs Act Preservation grant continued exterior repairs, a Community Development Block Grant re-roofed the building and rehabilitated a wing of the ground floor for a Senior Citizen's Center, and an Employment Incentive Grant paid for interior furnishings.

By 1989, the scene was set for the final push. The Windsor Hotel Limited Partnership, made up of many who were descendants of the original development group that had built the massive Victorian pile in 1892, sold shares to raise funds. Both state and federal preservation tax incentives were essential to this investment. The building opened in 1991, housing a 53-room hotel, retail businesses, a Senior Citizen's Center, and a corporate headquarters. Its continuing success has served as the catalyst for further business development and preservation activity downtown. Several large historic buildings have been rehabilitated or are underway—\$1,338,000 in private investment through the federal preservation tax incentives. One of the city's largest employers, Habitat for Humanity, International, impressed by the way in which the community had come together to support the Windsor, changed its plans to move to a location near the Interstate. Many of its 400 employees now occupy rehabilitated apartments in historic buildings downtown. The current mayor, Russell Thomas, who has been a key leader in both the public and private efforts for the Windsor since he was first elected in the early 1980s, credits the partnership preservation programs as a critical element in the community's success.

North Pacific Hotel, Seattle, Washington

The North Pacific Hotel in Seattle, Washington, presents a contrast in setting and function, yet is similar in its use of historic preservation to improve the quality of community life. The historic significance of this area of Seattle, now known as the International District, was first recognized by the city in 1973. The area previously known as Chinatown, then Japantown, and now multi-ethnic in population, was made a special historic review district under city ordinance. In 1986, the district was added to the National Register of Historic Places and recently a special historical study of Seattle's Asian-Americans by the SHPO through the University of Washington generated interest in associated historic places.

In the 1970s, young Asian-American activists became concerned with preserving the neighborhood's character in the wake of an Interstate highway through its center and the Kingdome development nearby. This led to the formation of community development agencies and organizations like the Interim Community Development Association (Interim). Interim began working on housing and social issues in the district, leveraging extensive public and private funding for housing, social service programs, parks, and a community garden. Reviews by the city's district review board as well as those required for the use of federal funding, not only helped to maintain the district's special historic character, but helped to create the cooperative working relationships between public agencies and the community organization that would support the North Pacific Hotel project.

For the project, Interim sought financing mechanisms and a project design that could meet the serious need for affordable housing. A Ford Foundation program directed at assisting non-profit community organizations, the LISC National Equity Fund, helped Interim to purchase the building and use both low-income housing and federal preservation tax incentives. Loan funds from the city and state were also part of the package, but ownership allowed Interim to set up the North Pacific Housing Limited Partnership and attract private investors, such as the Weyerhaeuser Company and the Bank of America. Since this was the first project in which both Interim and their designers, Kovalenko Architects, used the federal preservation tax incentives, SHPO staff assistance was important, as was the continued help from the city's preservation office in addressing local codes, zoning, and district requirements.

Compromises and alternative solutions to such issues as seismic design and non-conforming stairs that could meet both the requirements of NPS for the preservation tax incentives and those of state and local building codes, had to be worked out. The functional needs of housing for low-income families had to be accommodated. In the end, Interim was successful in developing 63 units of low-income housing and providing space on the ground floor for commercial enterprises, such as the oldest Japanese restaurant in the city. In order to involve the community in the project, Interim arranged with the nearby Wing Luke Museum for an exhibit in the lobby that tells the story of the early history of this "first-class" Japanese-owned hotel, follows the history during World War II when the district was decimated and the hotel operated by its new owner as a working man's single occupancy hotel, and traces the revitalization efforts that led to the re-opening of the building. Since then Interim has completed another similar

project using tax incentives, and two more are currently underway in the district.

Canal Place Heritage Area, Cumberland, Maryland

Cumberland's story begins in the 1960s when the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was designated a national historical park and included in the national park system. It continues in the 1970s, when spurred by the loss of a treasured landmark, the Queen City Railroad Station, the community began working with the SHPO to survey and nominate historic properties in the downtown to the National Register. During the next 10 years, the Washington Street Historic District and almost the entire downtown of late-19th and early-20th-century buildings were placed in the National Register, a local Historic District Commission was set up by the city, and a city-wide historic resource survey and conservation plan completed.

At this time, Cumberland was struggling to regain the economic prosperity of its heyday as a transportation and industrial center. Major industries were scaling back or closing. Various renewal efforts, including the creation of a pedestrian mall on Baltimore Street, tried to stabilize the downtown retail market. By the late 1980s, planning for a new highway threatened both the canal and the historic districts nearby. The Canal Parkway Development Study, a multi-agency planning effort, provided a vehicle for the involvement of the Maryland Historical Trust (the SHPO) to participate in reviews and technical assistance. As a result, the historic and archeological resources of the area have not only been "taken into account" as the law requires, but now form the basis for a new and comprehensive initiative.

In partnership with the SHPO, community leaders worked with their long-time representative to the state legislature, Speaker of the House Casper R. Taylor, and a former U.S. Senator, J. Glenn Beall, to use a new heritage tourism approach being developed by the national preservation community. The Canal Place Heritage Area and the Canal Place Preservation and Development Authority, established by state law in 1993, were the result.

The Authority's Canal Place Management Plan recognizes the importance of a coordinated and comprehensive development approach to the region's natural and historic resources and prescribes a series of actions that depend upon the cooperation of multiple agencies and organizations in leveraging private investment. Central to this process are the incentives and technical assistance of the national historic preservation partnership at all levels, from the NPS to the SHPO to city agencies and community organizations. Substantial state and federal funds support a variety of projects and

activities that will encourage and support economic development and heritage tourism. Station Square Plaza, whose opening was celebrated in 1994, is the initial project which provides visitor orientation, interpretive programs, and the starting point for several excursions. Already visitation has increased more than twelve-fold and has spawned several new businesses downtown—in fact, a net gain for the first time in many years.

Process to Successful Partnerships

There are common elements in the stories of these communities. Each initially established the value and significance of their historic resources—through surveys, National Register listing, and local designation. Protection and preservation of the resources, as well as their use in enhancing economic and community development, involved a long process of consultation, incentives, and technical assistance. Environmental impact reviews, whether through the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation process for federal funding or state environmental laws, helped to avoid adverse effects. These processes also brought technical assistance to state and local governments and produced forums for negotiation that helped both agencies and communities reach mutually agreeable decisions.

The amount of public grant funds available varied, but small preservation grants at key times and public funding for capital improvements were important catalysts. For example, federal preservation grants stabilized buildings, federal housing and community development funds rehabilitated them, and the enhancement provisions of the Transportation Act improved the places around them. In addition, the federal historic preservation tax incentives, state and local tax incentives in Georgia and Washington, and state grants in Maryland were brought to bear.

Public money and financial incentives, while significant, were not the whole story. Creative solutions, such as the financial structure used by the community development organization in Seattle, and the Main Street and Heritage Area programs in Americus and Cumberland required that public and private sector partners work together. The Main Street program's four point program for economic development and Heritage Areas, promoted through a coalition of national public and private organizations, were new techniques. Perhaps most important, and yet the easiest to overlook, was the continued technical assistance, especially through the SHPO and regional and local preservation planners, which brought advisors into the communities at key times to bring information and planning assistance to local agencies and organizations.

In many ways, the preservation partnerships at work in these communities are a model, in the relatively small amount of public money that has

generated private investment many times over, and in the way that decisions and actions have devolved to state and local agencies and organizations. The system may not be immediately evident, possibly because it works so well, but there is a structure of partnerships and systematic actions that is at work in communities nationwide.

Noted historic preservation educator Robert Stipe once compared the system to an elephant being described by several blind persons, each one identifying a particular piece, but none being able to describe the whole.* People may see the preservation system only in the particular application that immediately affects them, but what they are able to accomplish is the product of the whole. Underlying the system is the basic premise that the nation's history is the product of its state and local history. To be able to understand the place where

one lives and works in the context of its larger significance, and to have the resources generated by a national system available to its preservation and development are essential to preserving the nation's historic places as the National Historic Preservation Act directed 30 years ago: "as a living part of community life and development."

Note

*Robert Stipe in *The American Mosaic*, Robert E. Stipe and Antoinette J. Lee, eds., Washington, D.C.: US/ICOMOS, 1987, p. 2.

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Preservationists and educators in a Teaching with Historic Places workshop learn to look at Harpers Ferry, WV, in new ways. Photo by Beth M. Boland.



The National Historic Preservation Act calls for the preservation of our historic heritage so that "its vital legacy of cultural, educational, esthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans." Teaching with Historic Places, an education program of the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places, helps insure that today's youth recognizes the importance of that legacy. By using places listed in the National Register to "bring history to life" for students, the program connects the study of social studies, history, geography, and other subjects to their lives, helping them to learn better and also to appreciate the value of the nation's cultural resources. A variety of Teaching with Historic Places products and activities guide teachers, students, and historic site specialists through this process. Workshops and published guidance show preservationists and educators how to incorporate places into the curriculum and into the classroom. A series of ready-to-use lesson plans require students to be the historians as they study primary sources, historical and contemporary photographs and maps, and other documents, and search for the history around them in their own communities. For more information, contact Teaching with Historic Places, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20013-7127.

High school students study a map to help them gain a better "sense of place." Photo by James A. Percoco.

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