

The Benefits of Historic Preservation

Most preservationists believe that preserving buildings is an act of sustainable design. Sustainable design is design that has longevity built into it. It is continuous and self-supporting. The durability of historic buildings is often overlooked when preservation is discussed. Most people limit preservation to historic appearances of sites and buildings for “old town” atmospheres. However, preservation is also about sustaining urban environments that were originally built to last a long time and have lasted a long time.

The U.S. Department of the Interior notes that “Preservation calls for the existing form, materials, features, and detailing of a property to be retained and preserved.” This is inherently a sustainable action. The Federal government, as well as the Illinois government and your local municipality work toward the goal of sustainable design and development when administering historic preservation.

The benefits of living in a historic district are numerous and both tangible and intangible in character. Some of these benefits include:

- the promotion of neighborhood stability by insuring the preservation of historically and culturally significant areas;
- public recognition of architecturally and/or historically significant districts;
- preservation of culturally significant structures for future generations to enjoy;
- preservation of the architectural unity and physical characteristics of a neighborhood while promoting its improvement;
- sustainable urban development.

In some cases, designation triggers eligibility for economic benefits such as:

- the availability of federal income tax credits for rehabilitation of income-producing buildings in Village designated multi-building historic districts;
- the availability of various Cook County tax credits and programs;
- the availability of municipal incentive programs like the Façade Improvement Program;
- the availability of modest grants and loans from organizations like Landmarks Illinois, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and various state agencies like the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency; and
- the availability of small historic preservation grants which are awarded to nonprofit organizations on a competitive basis through the Certified Local Government Program. (Orland Park is a Certified Local Government).

Another benefit that is noted is that property values tend to reflect a historic district's desirability in most parts of the country. Historic districts are desirable places in which to live and work because of the neighborhood stability and the emphasis on sustainable design for durable buildings and community. Even so, designation as such appears to be neutral toward property values—it will not raise values through the label only.

Historic buildings also have many inherent attributes that are now promoted as green design, which is another benefit of historic preservation. For example, operable windows and cisterns that capture rainwater were features common in late nineteenth century buildings which are now championed as green. The essential aim of sustainable design is to produce places in a way that reduces use of non-renewable resources, minimizes environmental impact, and relates people with the natural environment.

Finally, historic preservation is also place-making. Place-making is about attracting people to pleasurable and interesting locations. Often historic districts with their varied and articulate architecture fill that role in communities as unique locations. This benefit makes a historic district a destination location.