

Historic Preservation



Vision

Historic preservation connects us to our heritage, enabling us to learn from and appreciate the stories and context of our past. Preserving our historic resources differentiates us as a community and contributes to our long-term cultural awareness and sustainability as a resort.

Philosophy

Preserving our historic built environment is vital to our culture: We are all stewards of our history. Through effective outreach and education, we strive to raise community awareness so that all of us feel responsible for the preservation of our history. While the overall goal of preservation is foremost, the process should be one of balance, predictability, fairness, consistency and integrity.

Preservation of our historic structures and sites connect us to the people, patterns, and events that are the fabric of our town in a way that photographs cannot replicate. In preserving our history, we ensure our culture and legacy is imparted to future generations. A respectfully restored historic structure or site honors the history and culture of our town, whereas a demolished one erases a piece of the Aspen story forever. Historic preservation is also aligned with our environmental ethic. Energy is saved by retaining existing structures and making them more efficient rather than demolishing the structure and building anew.

Mass, scale, and building proportions directly influence how people perceive our town. We must build on what we have by authentically preserving historic structures and creating thoughtful new buildings that are compatible with that feeling of historical continuity. While creativity in development is encouraged, additions and new buildings must be sensitive to historic patterns.

Aspen Through the Years

Aspen has an exciting history of pioneering spirit and innovation, including its establishment as a silver mining town in 1880 and its mid-century renaissance with the creation of the ski industry in the late 1930s and the Aspen Idea after World War II.

Between 1880 and 1892 Aspen grew to become the third largest city in Colorado, behind Denver and Leadville. In 1893, Congress repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and Aspen's development as a silver mining community quickly declined. Aspen's population dropped from 12,000 residents in 1893 to just 3,300 by 1900. The town settled into its quiet years until the creation of a downhill ski run by Andre Roch aptly called "Roch Run Trail" or "the Roch." Just after World War II in 1946, Aspen permanently carved out a place among international ski resorts in Europe with the longest chairlift in the world – Lift 1. Around the same time, industrialist Walter Paepcke and his wife Elizabeth began promoting Aspen as an intellectual center. The Paepckes had a clear vision for the town and brought influential and celebrated artists, writers, and thinkers to Aspen which led to the creation of the Aspen Institute, Aspen Center for Physics, and Aspen Music Festival to name a few, and ultimately led to the development of the Aspen Idea – the pursuit of mind, body and spirit.

Policies and Action Items

The following policies and action items are adopted to address the following critical issues: 1) Sharing the Aspen Story, 2) Updating the Historic Preservation Program, 3) Public Sector, 4) Publicly Accessible Interiors, 5) Review Process & Enforcement, 6) Historic Preservation Program Education, and 7) Energy Efficiency.

I. SHARING THE ASPEN STORY

Policies

1. Raise public awareness and appreciation for the Aspen story.

Action Items

- 1.a Create a publicly-accessible online database to collect and distribute information about our historic buildings. *(I – P, Aspen Historical Society)*
- 1.b Establish a system for compiling information about significant buildings that are demolished, including photographs and relevant stories about people and events associated with those buildings. *(LT – P, Aspen Historical Society)*
- 1.c Establish a Landmark Signage Program with standards for interpretive signs. *(I – P, HPC)*
- 1.d Collaborate with local organizations to plan events and related materials regarding our history and architectural innovation. *(LT – P, local agencies)*

II. UPDATING THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Policies

1. Evaluate the historic significance of Post World War II properties as part of the Historic Preservation Program.

Action Items

- 1.a Refine existing, and write new historic “Context Papers,” which examine architectural and cultural trends, as well as the people and events that place buildings and landmarks in the context of Aspen’s history. *(I – P)*
- 1.b Determine if Context Papers, Designation Criteria and Integrity Scoring Sheets are fair and effective tools to identify which properties should be designated. Make code changes as appropriate. *(LT – P)*
- 1.c Create a ranking system to evaluate Post-Victorian properties. *(I – P)*

Context Papers: Research papers that define Aspen’s architectural and cultural patterns in the context of local and national history and set the foundation for the landmark designation process.

Designation Criteria: Specific standards that are used to evaluate the significance of a property or building to local, state or national history. Like many other communities, Aspen’s adopted designation criteria are based on the federal government’s adopted designation standards for the National Register of Historic Places.

Integrity Scoring Sheets: Forms, organized by architectural style, that evaluate the physical changes made to a building over time and the impact of changes on the historic character. A score out of 100 points is determined based on physical characteristics. There are adopted thresholds that must be met to qualify for landmark designation.

II. UPDATING THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM, cont.

Policies

2. Ensure that new development respects the historic integrity of designated structures and is compatible with the surrounding context in terms of site coverage, mass, scale, height and form.

3. Ensure that the Historic Preservation Benefits Package encourages owners of landmark property to preserve structures to the highest possible degree of historic integrity while minimizing adverse impacts to the neighborhood.

Action Items

2.a Review Historic Preservation Design Guidelines and Commercial Design Guidelines to ensure that development is compatible with historic resources. (I – P)

2.b Use 3-D modeling to implement the policy. (I – P)

3.a Use 3-D modeling to compare and contrast what has been allowed under the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines and Benefits Package to what would have been allowed under regular zoning requirements. Consider amending the code to address impacts on the neighborhood based on the findings. (I - P)

3.b Research benefit packages for preserving properties in other communities, and incorporate best practices into City and County codes. (I - P)

3.c Explore the creation of benefits that do not affect development size, such as fee waivers or tax incentives, for historic properties (LT - P)

Historic Preservation Benefit Package: A group of incentives offered to owners of historic landmarks to encourage good historic preservation practices and to assist in their role as stewards of Aspen's heritage.



This property is an example of a property with a new addition that respects the historic context and integrity of the Victorian home.

Historic Preservation Benefits

The City code currently allows Historic Property owners access to:

- **financial benefits**, including rehabilitation loans, and fee waivers;
- **development benefits**, including dimensional variances, historic lot splits, and floor area bonuses;
- **technical assistance**, including tax credit application assistance; and
- **promotional efforts**, including historic markers, and annual awards from the Historic Preservation Commission.

II. UPDATING THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM, cont.

Policies

4. Maximize the use of the City’s Historic Transferable Development Right Program (TDR) as a method of preserving the historic integrity of designated structures.

Action Items

- 4.a Explore implementing a program similar to the County’s that tracks the availability of TDRs. (LT – P)
- 4.b Explore methods to track the sale price and other financial information of TDR transactions. (LT – P)
- 4.c Explore amending the Code to require Planned Unit Developments (PUD) to purchase TDRs for any square footage above the underlying zone district allotment. (LT – P)

City TDR Program: Allows landmarks to permanently remove unused square footage, in increments of 250 square feet, from the historic property to be sold on the free market as extra floor area to be constructed on another property within the city limits. This program reduces development pressure on historic properties.

III. PUBLIC SECTOR

Policies

1. The public sector should set an example as a responsible steward of preservation and adaptive re-use of historic buildings.

Action Items

- 1.a Establish a long-term plan for the viability, functionality and energy efficiency of all publicly-owned historic buildings. (I – P)
- 1.b Evaluate publicly-owned buildings and sites that are potential historic resources while also exploring appropriate changes in use or additions using new Context Papers, Designation Criteria and Integrity Scoring System. (I - P)
- 1.c Explore purchasing historic properties that can also meet buy-down program goals for Community Workforce Housing. (I – P, APCHA)

History of Preservation in the Aspen Area

The City of Aspen first took steps to preserve historic properties when the Main Street Historic District and the Commercial Core Historic District were established in the early 1970s. In addition, a handful of historic structures were designated as landmarks through the 1970s – but a more comprehensive approach was taken in the ‘80s and ‘90s when more than 200 historic properties were landmarked. The city currently has 280 properties that are designated historic.

In 2005, the county passed a significant revision to the Land Use Code providing for the protection of the important historic properties that exist in the urban growth boundary area. The county has also recently completed work on a preservation handbook, which provides background information on the history of the county, a description of the incentives available to historic property owners and good preservation practices.

IV. PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE INTERIORS

Policies

1. Preserve exceptional character-defining historic interiors in publicly accessible buildings.

Action Items

- 1.a Inventory historic landmarks that are publicly accessible and identify character-defining interior features. *(I - P)*
- 1.b Establish criteria for historic designation of character-defining historic interiors that balance preservation, functionality, and energy efficiency. *(I - P)*
- 1.c Use the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the preservation of historic interiors as guidelines for amendments to the Land Use Code. *(LT - P)*

Secretary of the Interior's Standards: Principles that are established by the National Park Service, under direction from the Department of the Interior, to advise Federal agencies on the preservation of historic properties eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. More information is available at: http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/preserve/preserve_standards.htm

V. REVIEW PROCESS & ENFORCEMENT

Policies

1. The Historic Preservation Commission's review process should be positive, productive and fair, with a high level of integrity, consistency and collaboration.

Action Items

- 1.a Ensure updates to the Historic Preservation program reflect the policy. *(I - P)*

2. Routinely and fairly enforce property specific approvals.

- 2.a Improve the City's and County's enforcement of its rules and regulations related to historic preservation. *(I - P)*
- 2.b Require on-going communication with staff during any renovation of or addition to historic structures or sites. *(I - P)*
- 2.c Examine the penalties for owners and historic contractors when they violate approvals to determine if these penalties are effective and fair. Amend the code based on the findings. *(LT - P)*

VI. HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM EDUCATION

Policies

1. Improve public awareness and understanding of the City and County Historic Preservation Programs.

Action Items

- 1.a Implement a comprehensive education program that explains the overall goal of the preservation programs, and rights and obligations of owners, developers, Realtors® and licensed historic contractors. *(I – P)*
- 1.b Update standards for public notices to include a non-technical summary about proposed projects and links to on-line development plans, staff reports, 3-D modeling, and meeting schedules. *(LT – P)*
- 1.c Use 3-D modeling as an educational tool for the public. *(LT – P)*
- 1.d Collaborate with local groups, such as the Aspen Historical Society, to plan special events related to Aspen Area history and architectural innovation, etc. *(I – P, local agencies)*



The Hildur-Anderson parcel is owned by the city, and is a good example of Rustic Architecture in the City.



Located at the base of Lift 1A, the Skier Chalet is an example of Chalet Architecture that was popular in the post-war era. The building was originally a lodge and is now planned to be affordable housing.



The old library building, located on Main Street across from Paepcke Park was designed by Fritz Benedict, and is an example of Aspen's Modern Architecture.

VII. ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Policies

1. All existing and future historic landmark properties should be maintained in a manner that improves energy efficiency while maintaining historic integrity.

Action Items

- 1.a Provide owners of historic landmarks with free assistance from the Building Department to facilitate energy-efficiency upgrades. *(I – B)*
- 1.b Provide information about energy-efficiency loans and other resources to all property owners that go through the historic preservation review process. *(LT – P, B)*