

CHAPTER NINE: HISTORIC PRESERVATION

NOTE: An asterisk () denotes text material adopted by Thurston County as the joint plan with Olympia for the unincorporated part of the Olympia Growth Area.*

INTRODUCTION

Historic preservation has many facets. But it largely involves the identification, maintenance, renovation and reuse of buildings and sites important to a community's history. These buildings and sites may represent building styles or development patterns typical of specific periods in the community's past, as well as places associated with important persons or historic events.

At all levels of government, historic preservation laws and ordinances reflect our desires to preserve our physical heritage by maintaining historic buildings and districts. These laws and ordinances have also been established to provide an orderly process to resolve development-preservation conflicts.

Historic preservation in Olympia has gained ground in recent years with the adoption of the Historic Preservation Ordinance and other actions taken by the City Council and neighborhood groups. This section of the comprehensive plan will look at some of these actions. But first, a brief history of the area is given.

A BRIEF LOOK INTO OLYMPIA'S PAST

For purposes of this history, we begin with a description of how Native Americans used the land in the Olympia area prior to European settlement. Development of the area by European settlers was linked to both political and commercial activities. These two factors continue to be the major influences on development in the region today.

Native Americans Started Olympia's Commerce

The peninsula on which Olympia was founded was called "Cheetwoot" (or bear) by people of the Nisqually Tribe. The tidelands of Budd Inlet were a favorite shellfish gathering site for many Puget Sound Native Americans, including ancestors of the Nisqually, Duwamish and Squaxin Tribes.

Archaeologists have found evidence that the inlet was a meeting place for Native Americans for centuries. On both sides of the inlet were sites of potlatch, a Northwest Native American custom in which tribal leaders shared their wealth with neighboring tribal groups.

The popularity of the inlet as a trading and gathering area for Native Americans led to the founding of a mission at Priest Point by Father Pascal Ricard of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1848. Guided by French Catholic clerics, local Native Americans grew a huge amount of produce and fruit. The mission continued its contributions to the local economy and education until 1860 when the missionaries left Olympia to concentrate on British Columbia ministries.

First European Settlers Arrive

The first European settlement in the area came in 1845 when the Michael T. Simmons party settled at "New Market" (Tumwater). The following year another party arrived in the area including Levi Lathrop Smith and Edmund Sylvester. These two jointly claimed the Cheetwoot area and named their townsite Smithfield.

In 1848, Sylvester inherited the claim upon Smith's death. Returning from the California goldfields, Sylvester platted the townsite in 1850 and renamed it Olympia after the Olympic Mountains which grace the northern horizon. He founded a New England type village with a central town square (Sylvester

Park) and tree-lined streets which were oriented to the saltwater much like his hometown of Deerfield, Maine.

Water-Oriented from the Start

When the first European settlements began in the Olympia area, the shorelines of Budd Inlet were much different than today. Olympia's early development took place around the present area of Olympia Avenue and Capitol Way. In 1855, Edward Giddings built a wharf at the foot of Main Street (now Capitol Way). The first Customs House, stores and hotels were located in this area which was then on the point of the peninsula.

Other settlements sprang up on either side of the inlet near Olympia. Two settlements in particular were influential in Olympia's growth. To the west (around Harrison Avenue) was the claim of Edwin Marsh which was known as Marshville. To the east (around Plum Street), Swantown began from the plat of John Swan. Traffic between these three settlements was largely by boat in the early days. As time passed, bridges were built connecting the three areas, beginning Olympia's present major east-west travel corridor of 4th, 5th, and State Avenues.

Olympia's early importance as a commercial and government center promoted early development along the waterfront. As the city grew, new development moved southward. Olympia developed on smaller lots than neighboring settlements as Olympians were business oriented and bought most of their food and goods. Their neighbors in Marshville and Swantown generally had large lots on which they could raise their own crops for market and to be more self-sufficient.

Early Commercial Products

Olympia's earliest exports are still big items today. Logs for piers in San Francisco were among the first shipments. The thick forests of the region, the harbor, the water power from the Deschutes River and local creeks contributed to lumber production.

The Olympia oyster was also among the first trade items from the region. Although dredging and pollution from pulp mills have since eliminated the commercial harvesting of oysters in Budd Inlet, shellfish are still an important export of the region.

Government Keys Growth Patterns

Along with commerce, government activities influenced early growth of the city. Olympia's role as capital of the territory and state has played a key role in the development of the city both in terms of number of residents and in development patterns.

The first territorial legislature met in 1853 in the Parker and Colter Company Store which was built by Edmund Sylvester near Olympia Avenue and Capitol Way. The sessions of 1854 and 1855 were held at 8th and Capitol Way in the first Masonic Temple of the Territory. A wooden capitol was constructed on the 12-acre site set aside by Sylvester in the original town plat.

The location of the capitol grounds has influenced growth patterns in the city since its beginning. As the capitol's location was moved around the city, new restaurants, hotels and houses would spring up to accommodate visiting legislators, as well as homes for resident state officials and workers.

Olympia's population growth has closely followed that of state employment in the area. With Tacoma and Seattle drawing most of the growth since the late 1800's, Olympia grew modestly until the 1950's. In 1954, the State Supreme Court ruled that state agencies must be headquartered at the seat of government, ending a century old battle to retain the status of capital city. This ruling and an increase in governmental activity across the country triggered a rapid growth for the Olympia area. This growth has moderated in the past few years, but continued growth will threaten our remaining historic resources unless they are protected or encouraged.

Periods of Growth--A Decade at a Time

The 1850's marked the beginning of Olympia's role as a port city and as a seat of government. The first steamboats called on Olympia during this time. The Territorial Governor, Isaac Stevens, designated Olympia the provisional capital in 1853 and two years later it was named as the permanent Territorial Capital. Other settlements which are part of modern Olympia also had their origins during this period. Olympia itself was officially incorporated in 1859. A year later a popular vote confirmed that Washington residents wanted the territorial capital to remain in Olympia.

The 1860's saw continued growth in shipping activities. In 1860, Samuel Percival and his son John built a dock at the site now known as Percival

Landing. The dock was renovated in 1865. The steamboat era flourished until the 1920's with the rise of highways and automobile use.

The 1870's brought rail traffic to the area. First indications were given that Olympia would become the coveted terminus for the Northern Pacific Railroad. But two years later, in 1873, Tacoma received the honor. Realizing the importance of the railroad, Olympians built their own line to the closest connection to the main line. This 15-mile line to Tenino was completed in 1878.

The 1880's was the decade of civic improvements and preparation for statehood. The City installed a water system and constructed a new bridge to Tumwater. Dredging efforts began to remedy the problem of mudflats at low tide in the harbor. A 4,789-foot wharf was constructed at the end of Main Street (Capitol Way). Electric lighting brought a metropolitan character to the city. Rail service between Olympia and Tumwater was also begun. An addition to the wooden capitol was built to house the constitutional convention. Statehood in 1889 capped the decade's events.

The 1890's began major changes to the shorelines of Olympia. The Army Corps of Engineers dredged the channel in 1893-4 and deposited dirt under the Fourth Street Bridge. The long wharf was abandoned in 1895, riddled with wood-boring worms. The Percival Dock, enlarged in 1891, saw more extensive use due to the dredging activities. During the 1890's, the original Lincoln, Garfield and Washington schools were built near their present locations.

The turn of the century brought further dredging and filling. A building boom in housing was also underway. Homes from this era are seen throughout the East, Southeast and South Capitol neighborhoods. A major dredging and filling operation between 1909 and 1911 added 29 blocks to Olympia. Filled areas included the Swantown slough (Cherry and Chestnut Streets), and the northern and western shores of the peninsula.

The most impressive building project of the 1910's and 1920's took place on the capitol grounds. Construction on the Temple of Justice commenced the complex of buildings which today are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The move of state government to the new capitol in 1928 marked a shift in emphasis in growth from the downtown area to other parts of the city. Also during this period, new versions of the Lincoln, Garfield, and Washington schools were built. They were designed in the

California Mission style by noted local architect Joseph Wohleb. He also designed the new Olympia Armory.

Voters approved the creation of a Port District in 1922. Lumber was the major export. The port built timber docks, piling and tracks throughout the 1920's which resulted in record-breaking years for cargo from 1928 to 1930 when the port hosted hundreds of ships.

The 1930's and 1940's were slow building years due to the Great Depression and World War II. However, some significant building projects were undertaken through funding by the Works Progress Administration and Emergency Relief Association. Among these were the Cherberg Building on the Capitol Campus and a number of projects at the Port of Olympia and the airport.

The 1950's brought both growth and decline to Olympia. Population and economic growth was triggered by the postwar growth in government activity and court rulings which required that state agencies be headquartered in Olympia. The 1958 completion of the freeway system which bypassed the city center contributed to the decline of the downtown area.

The 1960's continued the expansion of the capitol grounds. Many homes and the Olympia High School were razed to make room for this expansion east of Capitol Way.

The 1960's and 1970's witnessed decline in the downtown area due to competition from malls and shopping centers located outside the traditional downtown business district. This competition was for both the shoppers and the shops. Sears vacated its store on Legion Way and Franklin Street to relocate in the South Sound Mall which opened in 1965. In 1978, the opening of the Capital Mall included the relocation of another major downtown department store, J.C. Penney's. A number of smaller downtown businesses also expanded their operations or relocated in the malls and shopping centers.

The 1980's brought renewed life to Olympia's past. The city was named as a Washington Main Street City in 1984 and since that time has experienced considerable revitalization in the downtown sector. In addition, neighborhood organizations have formed in all parts of the city to give voice to zoning and preservation concerns. This and other factors led to Olympia being named an All- America City in 1987.

A Look at the Historic Neighborhoods

South Capitol Neighborhood. Homes in the South Capitol Neighborhood were largely constructed between 1910 and 1930. Because of its proximity to the Capitol Grounds and the downtown, many homes were built by local business and government leaders and reflect that prestige. Many classic "boxes," large bungalows and other spacious homes still make up this area. Two stately mansions dating from the 1920's are of particular note. Both listed on the National Register of Historic Places, they were built by prominent Olympians--Henry McCleary and C. J. Lord. The Lord Mansion now houses the State Capital Museum. The McCleary Mansion contains offices, including the State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. Much restoration has taken place in recent years to the homes of this neighborhood. In 1991 the South Capitol Neighborhood was designated a National Historic District (see Map 9-1).

Bigelow Neighborhood. Located just off East Bay Drive immediately north of State Street, the Bigelow Neighborhood hosts the Bigelow House, the oldest home in the city (1854) and one of the oldest in the Pacific Northwest. It is a Gothic revival style cottage. Along with the Bigelow House, National Register homes in this neighborhood include the Funk House, the Reinhart-Young House and the Rudkin House.

Eastside Neighborhood. This neighborhood contains many nice smaller Victorian homes from the late nineteenth century and very early twentieth century. The Eastside is one of the earliest areas to develop with plats dating to the 1870's, including that of John Swan which was known as Swantown. The White House is on the State Register, while the Patnude House is listed on the National Register.

Westside Neighborhood. Early development of this neighborhood included the plat of Edwin Marsh known as Marshville. Samuel Percival and Samuel Woodruff were also instrumental in the development of the Westside. Two homes in the neighborhood are on the State Register, the Giles House (1885) and the Lane House (1891).

Most of the Westside was platted in 1889 by Woodruff. A number of homes from that era remain, including the Mitchell House (1889), the Holbrook House (1892), and the Hartshorn House (1892). Woodruff Park was deeded to the City in 1892 by Woodruff.

South Olympia Neighborhood. South Olympia developed in the 1930's and 1940's, some of which was part of Cloverfields (1914), the Hazard Stevens farm.¹ Located on Carlyon Street, it is a National Register property. The neighborhood also had a fairground and racetrack. They operated until the 1920's, after which the property was subdivided. The large Cloverfield Farm was subdivided for housing in the 1940's. Residential development continues to the present, interspersed among the farm houses of an earlier day. Watershed Park, a 155-acre natural reserve which was once the site of Olympia's water supply, is also in this neighborhood.

Downtown. The Olympia/Tumwater area was one of the earliest settlements in the Puget Sound region. Some buildings from the 19th Century are still present, although most are changed from their original appearance. Among them are the Mottman Building; Chambers, Woodruff, and Reed Blocks; Cunninghams; the remodeled but historic Talcott's and Bettman's stores; and Barnes Bank on Capitol way. A historic resources inventory in 1984 found that twelve percent (18) of the buildings in the City Center date back to the 1800s. This compares to almost the same number (17) constructed from 1950 to the present. The primary character of the downtown is that of an early 20th-Century commercial center with its building styles reflecting that era. Over half the downtown's buildings in the historic part of the City Center were constructed in the three decades from 1900 to 1929.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION MEASURES

Although a number of individual properties had been inventoried and placed on the National and State historic registers by the late 1970's, the major activity came later. Our community's desire to revitalize the Downtown led in 1979 to a study by the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT). Selection as a Mainstreet City in 1984 added further strength to the preservation of Olympia's past. Although these two programs concentrated on the Downtown, city-wide historic preservation was encouraged.

In April of 1982, the City Commission called for a procedure for naming historic sites, in order to

¹Hazard Stevens was the son of Isaac Stevens, the first Territorial Governor. He also led the first ascent of Mt. Rainier, in 1870.

identify and encourage the continued use of places associated with Olympia's history. In August of that year, the Commission appointed a temporary committee to draft an ordinance for a historic preservation program in Olympia. The Commissioners felt that the buildings and areas which are the remaining physical evidence of the City's history should be offered protection and recognition for their historic importance.

The City Council adopted the Historic Preservation Ordinance on May 17, 1983. The ordinance established a Heritage Commission which serves as the City's chief advisory body on matters of history and historic preservation. The Heritage Commission also works to educate the public through brochures, tours and workshops. The Heritage Commission's work includes the creation and maintenance of a local register. This Commission also serves as an advisory review board for proposed changes to properties listed on the local register, and administers a 1985 state program for special property tax valuation for historic properties.

In 1986, a comprehensive survey and inventory of Olympia's historic resources (the Cultural Resources Inventory for Olympia) was conducted through a grant from the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. This inventory provides important background information which the Heritage Commission uses in evaluating requests to place sites on historic registers.

In 1986, Olympia was designated as a "Certified Local Government (CLG)." This national recognition enhances Olympia's ability to receive financial and technical assistance from state and federal sources. Under the CLG program, the City's Heritage Commission becomes more directly involved in the nomination process of properties to the National and State Registers of Historic Places. This increases the city's ability to protect its heritage by placing properties on these registers.

GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL HP1. To use historic resources as a key element in the overall design of the City.

POLICIES:

HP 1.1 The Capitol dome should be a focal point in the design of the City.

HP 1.2 Views of Mt. Rainier, the Olympic Mountains, the Black Hills, Budd

Inlet, the Capitol Building, Capitol Lake and its surrounding hillsides strongly influence the scenic qualities of the city. They are also important to the historic character of the community in enhancing the area as a center for tourism and recreation. Outstanding views of these features must be protected.

HP 1.3 Zoning should be compatible with and conducive to continued preservation of historic neighborhoods and properties.

HP 1.4* The City should safeguard and manifest its heritage which is represented by those sites, buildings, districts, structures and objects which reflect significant elements of the City's history.

GOAL HP2. To foster civic and neighborhood pride in the beauty and accomplishments of the past by establishing, preserving, and enhancing the City's historic identity.

POLICIES:

HP 2.1 Older neighborhoods should be assisted in discovering their social and economic origins and in appreciating their historic features. Preservation of their historic character and identity should be facilitated in order to:

- a. provide focal points of historic interest,
- b. preserve those elements which are unique to Olympia or which exemplify its past development periods,
- c. provide a blending of outstanding older structures with newer development, and
- d. enhance the richness and diversity of Olympia.

HP 2.2* New developments should complement and not detract from historic structures, by use of compatible mass, scale, materials, setting, setback, etc.

GOAL HP3*. Establish programs which effectively identify, recognize, and encourage the preservation and continued use of historic buildings, districts, structures and sites which give physical evidence of the City's history and development periods.

POLICIES:

HP 3.1 The City should continue to encourage the Olympia Heritage Commission in its works to preserve the City's heritage.

a. The City should continue to facilitate the preservation of its historic identity and its more important historic resources through the Olympia Heritage Commission, the Heritage Register and the historic marker program.

b. The Cultural Resources Inventory for Olympia should be used and publicized as a planning document for zoning, development, and preservation activities within the city. The inventory should be periodically updated and expanded.

c. The City should develop a historic preservation plan to guide future decisions on historic properties, to plan the activities of the Heritage Commission, and for other purposes.

d. Because of Olympia's close proximity to and shared history with adjacent governmental jurisdictions; and because of interest by local residents and visitors alike in the history and historic resources of the area as a whole, including the State Capitol; City historic preservation programs should be closely coordinated with those of adjacent governments, particularly in programs of public

information about the area's history and development.

HP 3.2*

The City should provide assistance, encouragement, and incentives to private owners for preservation, restoration, redevelopment, and use of historic buildings, districts, neighborhoods, streets, structures, objects and sites.

- a. The City should assist owners of significant properties in using those properties in a manner compatible with preservation objectives.
- b. Preservation should be encouraged through voluntary action with emphasis on incentives and information.
- c. Incentives and recognition should be provided for rehabilitation or restoration which is compatible with preservation objectives.
- d. The City should continue to assist historic preservation through the program for property tax special valuation for improvements to historic buildings. The City should continue to mitigate building code requirements for Olympia Heritage Register properties.
- e. The City should consider establishing a program for transfer of development rights from historic properties.

HP 3.3

The City should promote and provide for the early identification and resolution of conflicts between the preservation of historic resources and competing land uses.

HP 3.4

The City should encourage preservation of intact historic structures and discourage partial

demolitions or retention of merely a facade.

HP 3.5 The City should support public or non-profit acquisition of its most important historic resources if the efforts identified in Policy HP 3.1 through HP 3.4 are not sufficient to ensure their preservation.

GOAL HP4*. To integrate historic preservation objectives into City decision processes.

POLICIES:

HP 4.1 Historic preservation objectives should be integrated into all City development programs and with all elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

HP 4.2 As part of capital planning for city parks, consideration should be given to budgeting park development funds to restore historic sites on park property or to put interpretive historic information at park sites.

HP 4.3 The City should nominate eligible City-owned properties to the city, state and/or federal registers.

HP 4.4 The City should be conscientious in considering the impact of work on historic and/or archaeological sites in accord with NEPA/SEPA.

HP 4.5* Transportation planning should take into account impacts on historic properties, archaeological sites, historic districts, etc.

GOAL HP5. Provide for the continuing revitalization of deteriorating residential areas within the city.

POLICIES:

HP 5.1 City housing rehabilitation programs should be carried out without damaging the historic features or the character of historic properties. Private rehabilitation should be assisted in doing the same.

HP 5.2 Assistance and incentives should be provided for the rehabilitation of historic properties so that low- and moderate-income individuals are not displaced.

GOAL HP6. Use historic resources to promote economic stability in the City.

POLICIES:

HP 6.1 To strengthen its economic vitality, the City should promote the stabilization and improvement of property values in historic areas, and encourage new buildings and developments to be harmonious with existing historic buildings and areas.

HP 6.2 Historic resources should be used to protect and enhance the City's ability to attract tourists and visitors.

GOAL HP7*. Conserve the city's (and the earth's) valuable resources.

POLICIES:

HP 7.1* Conserve valuable physical, natural and energy resources by promoting the use and maintenance of the existing built environment.

HP 7.2 The City should encourage the use of existing structures rather than constructing new ones by identifying those structures of historic merit worthy of preservation.

GOAL HP8. Preserve and enhance Downtown's historic character and its significant historic buildings, structures, and sites.

POLICIES:

HP 8.1 Historic preservation should be encouraged in the Downtown to provide focal points of historic interest to those structures and places that are unique to Olympia or which exemplify past periods of its development, to provide a blending of outstanding older structures with newer development,

and to enhance the richness and diversity of Olympia.

a. A historic district should be considered in the Downtown by property owners and the Heritage Commission working join

b. The City should give incentives for the use/re-use of existing structures, especially those identified by the Heritage Commission survey to be of pivotal, primary or secondary importance.

(1) The pivotal category includes major structures or spaces which have strong historic and cultural associations, make strong architectural statements, and have not undergone alterations that materially affect their original appearance.

(2) The primary category includes buildings that are important historically and architecturally but are not as dominant as those in the pivotal category. They may have undergone some structural changes but a great many of their original architectural features are still visible or can be restored without major reconstruction.

(3) The secondary category includes buildings that are not architecturally strong but are of a scale and have general design elements that complement the pivotal

and primary buildings. Some of these would be in the primary or pivotal category in terms of architectural or historical importance except that they have undergone major structural changes. Others are very plain but display particular design features characteristic of earlier periods and contribute to the historic atmosphere of Downtown.

c. The facades of the structures in these categories should be restored as close to their original construction as possible while allowing the structures to be used in an economically viable manner.

HP 8.2

Both public and private rehabilitation projects should be carried out without damaging historic features or character.

HP 8.3

The design of new buildings or renovations should be compatible with the established pattern, alignment, size and shape of existing buildings. This is especially critical when developing next to a building designated in the pivotal, primary or secondary category established by the Heritage Commission.

HP 8.4

Where redevelopment projects are proposed for sites containing designated historic buildings, a reasonable effort should be made to incorporate the historic building into the new site plan before considering demolition or moving it from its original location.

OTHER CITY OF OLYMPIA DOCUMENTS ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

In recent years, the City Council has commissioned and accepted a number of documents dealing with historic preservation. Each of these documents include bibliographies. A list of these documents follows:

A Walking Tour of Historic Downtown Olympia. Olympia Heritage Commission. August 1985, updated 1987.

Olympia Cultural Resources Inventory. Prepared by Shanna Stevenson and Thomas Costantini. Funded by the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. January 30, 1986. 134pp.

Downtown Olympia's Historic Resources. Olympia Heritage Commission, December 1984. 124 pp.

City of Olympia Historic Preservation Ordinance. Adopted May 17, 1983 by the Olympia City Council. 24pp.

Historic Preservation in Olympia: Discussion of Issues. Marie Cameron, Olympia Planning Department, May 5, 1983. 66 pp.

Historical Preservation in Olympia: A Preliminary Survey of Olympia's Historic Resources. Prepared as part of the work of an ad hoc Historic Preservation Committee appointed August, 1982 by the Olympia City Commission. 174pp.

The following three slideshows also deal with historic preservation:

Gateway to History. Jean Taylor, Fall of 1986. 10 minutes. 80 slides.

Window of the Past. Jean Taylor, June 1986. 10 minutes. 95 slides.

Shelter in Thurston County: The Residential Legacy. Tom Costantini (writer) and Jean Taylor (producer), October 1986. 30 minutes. 130 slides.

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