

Workers remove a mansard roof from a commercial building in the Paseo Historic District, revealing Art Deco ornament and historic signs below.



chapter one

INTRODUCTION: WHY PRESERVE?

“Old ideas can sometimes use new buildings. New ideas must use old buildings.”

- Jane Jacobs,
The Death and Life of Great American Cities

What is **preserveokc**?

preserveokc is Oklahoma City’s first citywide plan for historic preservation and was a key recommendation in **planokc**. **preserveokc** identifies strategies, policies, and priorities for the rehabilitation of the historic resources that collectively define the culture and heritage of Oklahoma City.

preserveokc highlights the role that historic preservation has already played in successful revitalization of neighborhoods, commercial districts, and landmark buildings. It demonstrates the value of integrating historic preservation into future city planning and development efforts.

Finally, the plan proposes a strategy for continued revitalization success by blending preservation, sustainability and economic development as a powerful tool that reinforces Oklahoma City’s unique community character and sense of place.

Why create **preserveokc**?

Over the past 25 years, Oklahoma City has experienced an undeniable renaissance, much of which has been fueled by the revitalization of the city’s historic structures, neighborhoods, and commercial districts. Visionaries at the heart of the city’s revitalization efforts have evolved into a community of city officials, residents, property owners, developers, and business leaders, all of whom understand firsthand the irreplaceable cultural and economic value of our community’s historic resources.

Oklahoma City’s renaissance has not been a quick fix with instant results; nor has it been steered by the whims of market trends and economic fluctuations. It has required significant investment of public resources and political capital with a long-term commitment to good planning and the methodical achievement of community goals. Similarly, historic preservation is about taking the long view to realize the potential value of historic places for future generations. **preserveokc** is about establishing a vision for this community’s historic resources and using preservation as a proactive tool to guide long-term revitalization.

Issues and Opportunities

Historic preservation is well established in Oklahoma City as a priority for government and a beneficial and rewarding endeavor for the private sector. The city's most consistent development trends and nearly all of plan**okc**'s Big Ideas align closely with the goals of historic preservation. This alignment is demonstrated by ongoing market interest in established, existing neighborhoods and commercial districts; in demands for districts with walkability, high quality of life amenities and a strong sense of identity and place, and in increasing demand for development that is both economically and environmentally sustainable. Yet many challenges remain for historic preservation to be recognized as the community's first response. The following key issues encapsulate the city's challenges and opportunities identified in the development of preserve**okc**.



Community Engagement with Preservation

Oklahoma City has a diverse population, and includes many different cultures, histories, experiences, and perspectives within the larger city. Oklahoma City residents, including community leaders, vary in their understanding of and engagement with historic preservation. We have the opportunity to broaden the public's appreciation of history and to encourage public discourse about which historic resources matter most to our community.

*Oklahoma City has a large, multi-generational Vietnamese community who funded and organized the installation of a **Vietnam War memorial** in **Military Park**, dedicated in 2017. This community is under-represented in historic preservation sites and initiatives in Oklahoma City.*



City-Owned or Controlled Historic Resources

Oklahoma City has frequently rehabilitated and maintained historic resources for the City's use, or as part of larger projects like MAPS. These efforts invest in existing infrastructure, spur revitalization in surrounding areas, and enhance the quality and character of important places in Oklahoma City. As the owner and steward of numerous historic properties, the City of Oklahoma City has an important opportunity to lead by example in historic preservation.

*The **Oklahoma City Municipal Building**, rehabilitated between 1995 and 1998, restored many of the historic interior spaces. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007.*



Unprotected Historic Resources

Oklahoma City has a long-established Historic Preservation Commission, flourishing historic districts, and numerous other design review processes and zoning tools that provide some protection for historic resources. Beyond these tools, many historic resources are unidentified or unprotected. As Oklahoma City grows, so too must the array of tools available for preserving Oklahoma City's unique character.

*The **Epworth United Methodist Church** was the pre-statehood home to what would become Oklahoma City University. This building is in the National Register of Historic Places, but there are no local protections in place to require review for changes to, or demolition of, the building.*



Investment in Revitalization

Oklahoma City has skillfully stimulated investment and revitalization through the use of incentives in many key areas such as downtown. Often, the resulting projects include rehabilitation of historic structures. More work can be done to ensure that incentives encourage and prioritize historic preservation over demolition. In addition, we must develop incentives specifically targeting the rehabilitation of historic resources.

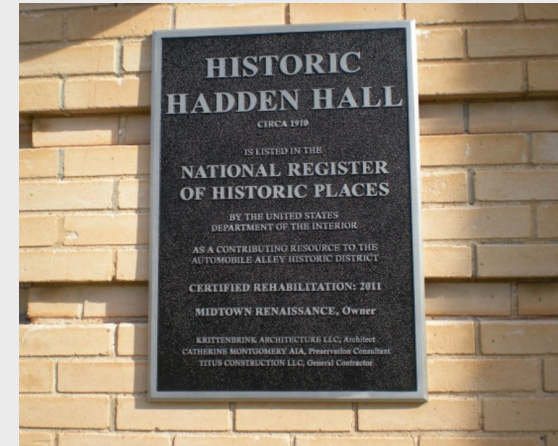
*The **Sunshine Cleaners building**, now Stonedcloud Brewing, used numerous incentives to convert a 1929 industrial laundry facility into a brewery and taproom, contributing to additional reinvestment in west downtown. The property was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2016.*

What is Historic Preservation?

Historic Preservation: *The adaptive reuse, conservation, protection, reconstruction, rehabilitation or stabilization of sites, buildings, districts, structures or monuments significant to the heritage of the people of Oklahoma City.*

-Oklahoma City Municipal Code

Historic preservation is a broad tool, extending far beyond the regulated historic districts, meticulous rehabilitations of landmark buildings, or straight-laced house museums often associated with the concept. At the core of the of historic preservation is an emphasis on the heritage of the people of Oklahoma City.



Knowing our History

Historic Preservation includes **research and documentation**, the foundation of knowledge about historic places. Efforts such as historic building inventories, archeological surveys, National Register nominations, and Historic Landmark designation reports provide a record of the places that define Oklahoma City's heritage.

*A plaque indicates the National Register status of **Hadden Hall** in Midtown Oklahoma City.*



Maintaining Authenticity

Historic Preservation includes the **physical work** of **maintaining**, or **rehabilitating**, a historic place. From a simple repair to a transformative adaptive reuse, the physical fabric of a place maintains its authenticity, making it a true historic site rather than an inaccurate reproduction.

Participants in a workshop learn to make repairs to wood windows, retaining the historic character and improving the efficiency and sustainability of the historic home.



Engaging with Place

Historic Preservation is a **participatory activity** for the City and the public. Whether conducting a tour of City Hall for school children, attending a public meeting about a historic district, or demonstrating on a street corner in front of an important landmark, historic preservation is about engaging with the past through the built environment.

*A group gathers on the steps to tour the recently rehabilitated **Oklahoma State Capitol Building**.*



Revitalizing Community

Historic Preservation includes the **revitalization** of entire **neighborhoods** and **districts**, retaining their character and identity, along with their economic viability. Beyond the individual buildings, everything from the massing and rhythm of the built environment to the flow of the natural landscape make up the distinctive character of a neighborhood or district.

***The Pump** is a thriving business in a former filling station within the Paseo Historic District. This adaptive reuse retained the historic character of the property while establishing a new function, and is part of a larger revitalization effort in the surrounding area.*

What are Historic Resources?

Historic Resource: Sites, districts, structures, buildings, or monuments that represent important facets of history in the locality, State, or nation; places where significant or historic events occurred; places associated with a significant personality or group important to the past.

- Oklahoma City Municipal Code

“**Historic resource,**” in the context of this plan, is a broad term describing properties that have historic, architectural, or archeological significance, and that may or may not be formally designated in some way. In addition to the familiar buildings and districts, historic resources include a diverse list of **property types**, including statues and monuments, bridges and dams, archaeological sites, and even parks and landscapes. These resources define the full scope of the physical environment in which history has taken place.



Monuments

Monuments or objects may include artistic or symbolic installations, such as a fountain or sculpture. **The Pioneers of 1889**, sculpted by Leonard McMurry and donated to the City of Oklahoma City by BD and Pauline Eddie in 1959, represents not only the subject matter of the piece itself, but the history associated with its creation, installation, and those involved in designing and commissioning the piece.



Landscaped Sites

Designed landscapes, such as parks or cemeteries, may be significant for their design, for the history surrounding their development, or significant events that occurred there. **Will Rogers Gardens and Arboretum** is listed in The National Register of Historic Places and is significant for its design.



Structures

Structures, distinct from buildings, may include bridges, dams, or even grain silos. They may represent great architectural design or feats of engineering, or be associated with important historic events. The **Overholser Dam** is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is significant for its engineering and transportation history.



Other Property Types

Some historic sites have little or no physical evidence of human activity or alteration, at least that is visible to the naked eye. They may contain significant archeological resources, carry cultural or spiritual significance to a group, or be the identifiable site of a historic event, such as a battlefield. The **Ringling the Wild Horse** site in northeast Oklahoma City is listed in the National Register for its association with Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies*, published in 1835.

Preservation Tools

While historic preservation encompasses a broad range of activities, incentives, and regulations, and varies widely across the country, there are some specific programs already at work in Oklahoma City. The following is a summary of the most prevalent programs already in use in Oklahoma City.



National Register of Historic Places

Created by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, this is the federal government's list of historic resources.

Listing on the National Register provides honorary recognition and limited protection from federal undertakings. Listing may qualify a property for financial incentives, such as state and federal tax incentives.

The City of Oklahoma City regularly assists property owners with listing their properties, and is active in listing city-owned historic resources. Thousands of historic resources in Oklahoma City are listed, either individually or as part of National Register districts.

*The **Milk Bottle Building**, **Gold Dome**, and **Citizens Bank Tower** are all National Register-listed properties.*



Historic Preservation/ Landmark Zoning

Since 1969, Oklahoma City has used historic preservation zoning to protect important historic districts and individual buildings. Like other forms of zoning, Historic Preservation/Landmark Districts are established through a public process and require adoption by the City Council.

Designation as a Historic Preservation or Landmark District requires review of changes to the exterior of properties or to sites, including review of demolition, by the City of Oklahoma City's Historic Preservation Commission.

*The **Union Soldiers' Cemetery**, where veterans of the Civil War were buried, is a locally-designated Historic Landmark.*



Special Design District Zoning

Like Historic Preservation/Landmark zoning, Special Design District zoning creates identified districts in key areas of Oklahoma City and requires review of changes to the exterior of properties and sites, including demolition.

Though not specifically focused on historic preservation, these districts contain many historic resources and emphasize the importance of preserving and revitalizing the historic and architectural character of areas like Downtown, Bricktown, and Capitol Hill.

***Stockyards City** is a Special Design Zoning District. The district is also a National Register District and part of the Oklahoma Main Streets program.*



Preservation Easements

The City of Oklahoma City has the ability to accept the donation of historic preservation easements. Different from zoning, an easement is an agreement executed by a property owner and filed as part of the property records.

Preservation easements provide a customizable alternative to historic preservation/landmark zoning and may qualify as a tax-deductible donation.

*Oklahoma City currently holds one preservation easement on the **Skirvin Hilton Hotel**.*

Benefits of Historic Preservation

For the purist, perhaps the greatest benefit of historic preservation is its ability to inform us about the past. Beyond the philosophical importance of knowing our history, communities benefit from historic preservation activities in far-reaching and tangible ways, the evidence of which is already clear in Oklahoma City.

From thriving neighborhoods and distinctive commercial districts, to economic revitalization and environmentally-sustainable development, historic preservation is a vital ingredient in what makes Oklahoma City a great place to live, work, play and grow.

Thriving Neighborhoods

In 2017, the Oklahoma City Council established seven Council Priorities to guide the city's governance and future development. One of these priorities is to "promote safe, secure, and thriving neighborhoods." The Council Priority asserts that: "Neighborhoods are the building blocks of a great city and residents expect safe neighborhoods that provide a high quality of life. We will continue to promote strong and safe neighborhoods by providing public safety services, effective code enforcement, and support for neighborhood revitalization efforts."

Oklahoma City recognizes that desirable places to live are key to a community's vitality and economic strength. This is supported by Oklahoma City's 2013 *Housing Market Preference and Demand Survey*, which found that drivers for housing demand increasingly include factors like mixed-use environments, walkability to services and entertainment, and "sense of place."

This study highlights the important role of preserving historic neighborhoods in Oklahoma City's continued success. Nearly 80% of households surveyed value the overall quality of the neighborhood, including sense of place, sidewalks, and access and proximity to amenities, over the characteristics of a particular house such as size.

Oklahoma City's 2014 *Community Appearance Survey* further documented strong support for attributes such as pedestrian-friendly streets with sidewalks, mature landscaping, inconspicuous garages, and front porches, as well as a diverse mix of housing types such as duplexes and fourplexes. Many of these characteristics are found in Oklahoma City's pre-World War II neighborhoods.

The Housing Study identifies historic areas from Classen Ten-Penn to Capitol Hill as

ripe for redevelopment and revitalization. **okc** Survey respondents identified 25 of their own neighborhoods as "historic" but not zoned HP/HL. Nearly 80% of those indicated that their neighborhoods were constructed prior to the 1930s. Preservation is key to ensuring that the desirable characteristics of these areas are maintained and enhanced in balance with their revitalization.

Preserving diverse housing stock in historic areas also improves socioeconomic diversity in these neighborhoods. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's *Atlas of ReUrbanism* (2016) documents the ability of neighborhoods with mixed-age housing stock and a range of unit types to offer housing for a wider range of household incomes than in more homogenous neighborhoods. Numerous studies, including *Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Oklahoma* (2008, by the Center for Urban Policy Research for Preservation Oklahoma, Inc.) document the stabilizing effect of historic preservation on property values.

Preserving and revitalizing our many historic neighborhoods creates a livable, walkable, attractive environment that meets a range of housing needs while offering a high quality of life and sense of place.

It has been said that, at its best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future.

- William J. Murtagh,
first Keeper of the National Register

Right: In 2010, the American Planning Association named Oklahoma City's **Paseo Arts District** as one of its Ten Great Places in America in the Neighborhoods category. This prestigious national award highlighted The Paseo's 1920s Spanish Revival architecture featuring tile roofs, stucco, parapets, arched windows and doors, and embellishments such as scroll and crest relief and ornamental iron. Paseo's urban context, mix of uses, scales of development, and enduring sense of place work together to make this district unique in Oklahoma City.

In addition to its great success as a preservation story, the Ten Great Places award is also well-deserved recognition for the many layers of planning, private investment, and public funding that have cumulatively supported Paseo's return from the brink of dilapidation in the 1970s, to its rebirth as one of Oklahoma City's most beloved and economically successful places.





Vibrant Economy

One of the most important responsibilities of a city is to create and maintain a healthy and diverse economy. Another of the seven Council Priorities, “Maintain Strong Financial Management,” recognizes this:

Growing the revenue base through greater diversification of revenue sources and promoting greater opportunity for our citizens to earn higher incomes will help the City meet the needs of our citizens as the City grows.

In other words, it benefits the City and its residents to encourage diverse economic activity that creates high-paying jobs, funneling that money back into the local economy. Few economic activities generate more investment than the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

Every public dollar spent on the historic tax credit spurs **ten times** the investment, including things like the purchase of materials and workers’ wages, according to the study *Oklahoma Historic Tax Credit: Impact on the Oklahoma Economy* (2016), prepared by PlaceEconomics for the Tulsa Foundation for Architecture.

Across the state, historic rehabilitation projects have created an average of 450 jobs per year, generating more jobs, and higher-paying jobs, than new construction. Oklahoma City has benefited as the location of nearly half of these projects since 2006, generating over \$240 million in investment.

Left: Historic neon and blade signs in **Oklahoma City’s Stockyards** City are important features of the National Register-listed historic district’s distinctive character.



Because the study does not account for historic rehabilitations projects that did *not* use historic tax credits, it cannot account for the positive domino effect of economic activity generated as properties neighboring tax credit projects are motivated to undertake their own rehabilitation projects.

The economic benefits of historic preservation do not stop when the rehabilitations are complete. The City of Oklahoma City's study *Addressing Vacant and Abandoned Buildings in Oklahoma City* (2013) documents the economic impact of a vacant building on neighboring owners' property values, and on revenues generated for the City. Properties that use historic tax credits **are required to** be put back into income-producing use, which equates to the creation of long-term jobs, increased property values, and other revenue-generating activities.

Research by the National Trust for Historic Preservation further supports the economic significance of reusing historic buildings. A study of 50 cities across the country found that commercial areas with a building stock diverse in size and age had 45% more small-business jobs and 33% more jobs in start-up businesses than did areas with more homogenous building stock. Areas with older, smaller, mixed age buildings also have a higher percentage of women- and minority-owned businesses.

Oklahoma City contains numerous examples of the economic successes spurred by the revitalization of historic structures. Districts including Automobile Alley, Paseo, Film Row, Bricktown, the Plaza District, Stockyards, Uptown 23rd Street, Capitol Hill, and Western Avenue collectively illustrate the economic activity generated by revitalizing historic

buildings with new, diverse, and often locally-generated uses. These thriving districts offer models that can be built on throughout the city.

**Every \$1 awarded in historic tax credits
spurs \$11.70 in economic activity.**

**- Oklahoma Historic Tax Credit
Report, Tulsa Foundation for
Architecture**

Above: Completed in 1910, the **Colcord Building** at 15 N. Robinson was one of Oklahoma City's first skyscrapers. Listed in the National Register in 1976, the office building was converted to a hotel and restaurant in 2006.

Quality of Place

planokc's Issue Focus 8: "Place Quality" recognizes the importance of our civic assets, commercial nodes and corridors, and our recreational facilities, noting that "good places are good business." Distinctive places are key to the city's economic future and quality of life. Special districts and attractions add texture and distinctiveness to the city and create a unique and interesting place to live and visit.

Across the country, cities are striving to "arrive," to attract residents and visitors, and to become destinations. The most successful attractions are great places that are distinctive and memorable, inviting visitors to linger and experience the place rather than simply pass through.

planokc's Community Appearance Survey highlights residents' preferences for streetscapes, storefronts, and buildings that address pedestrians rather than vehicular traffic. planokc's Housing Market Study further documented Oklahoma City residents' interest in proximity and access to these amenities when choosing where to live.

For the past 70 years, American development trends have overwhelmingly built dispersed, low-density development only accessible by car. These development patterns do not support the distinctive, human-scale features, or critical mass necessary to become great places.

Oklahoma City's historic commercial districts often embody the physical characteristics of memorable places: human-scale, walkability, with distinctive design, flanked by historic neighborhoods. The compact size and scale of

these areas is what make them diverse and dynamic, well-suited to revitalization.

It is no surprise that each of planokc's six identified "cultural districts," and four potential future cultural districts, are within historic areas. These places are identified as "experience centers" that strengthen their surrounding neighborhoods, branded with distinctive identities through their atmosphere and their physical environment.

A 2011 study by American Express entitled *Open Independent Retail Index: A Study of Market Trends in Major American Cities* found that historic areas blessed with the right mix of entrepreneurs, infrastructure, and customers often draw business from a much wider area, sometimes becoming regional or even national destinations.

The study found on average that neighborhoods surrounding historic commercial districts gained 50% more in home values over their citywide markets over the 14 years preceding the study. The study adds that these business districts

"aren't just places to shop or eat. They are community amenities that the market values highly. Just living near one provides increases in property value well beyond the broader market. They are community employment centers, too, bringing jobs into established neighborhoods where people live and transit works."

Distinctive destinations also attract visitors (and their money) from outside of Oklahoma City. Research shows that cultural tourists – those looking for accommodations, venues, and

experiences that reflect a destination's culture – spend as much as 60% more than "leisure" travelers. Cultural tourists, and particularly millennials, value engagement with a destination's cultural assets and authenticity in the travel experience ("Cultural Tourism: Attracting Visitors and Their Spending" by Cheryl Hargrove, prepared for Americans for the Arts).

Beyond these identified districts, Oklahoma City is rich with commercial nodes, corridors, and other public spaces offering rich opportunities for the creation of many more great places. These places are not without challenges, from their physical condition to regulations that make adaptive reuse difficult. Parks have been a priority since Oklahoma City's earliest planning initiatives, but are chronically underfunded, with little emphasis on maintenance of the distinctive historic features embedded within them.

Revitalized historic resources are the building blocks of great places. Intertwined with the livability of neighborhoods and the creation of jobs and economic activity, they create destinations for residents and attractions for tourists. Historic preservation is one of Oklahoma City's most effective tools in the creation of a city of great places.

*If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you
get cars and traffic. If you plan for people
and places, you get people and places.*

- Fred Kent,
Project for Public Spaces

Right: The addition of pedestrian amenities including street furniture, lighting, and landscaping helped to transform a declining neighborhood commercial corridor into one of the city's liveliest historic commercial districts, the **Plaza District**.





LEED Certification for Existing or Historic Buildings

LEED Certification is the “seal of approval” of the United States Green Building Council for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Many associate the honor with new construction; however, LEED certification also includes a category specifically for “existing buildings”. LEED status is awarded to many existing and historic properties across the country that make improvements to their energy efficiency while retaining historic character.

There are no LEED-certified historic buildings in Oklahoma City, but there are many successful examples across the country. The **Balfour-Guthrie Building** in Portland, Oregon was constructed in 1919 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building attained LEED Silver Certification in 2002.

Sustainable Growth

Historic preservation is premised on the reuse of existing structures over demolition and new construction, and promotes the revitalization of existing neighborhoods and commercial districts in lieu of new development and additional sprawl. This emphasis on the retention, repair, and recycling of our established built environment aligns perfectly with efforts to protect our environment and create a more sustainable city.

Our Common Future, a 1987 United Nations report, defined “sustainable development” as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This broad concept is now woven into regional and city planning across the country. **planokc** routinely references the critical need for planning evaluations that balance the environmental, fiscal, and social effects of development and land use decisions and consider their impact on the health of residents, businesses, and natural resources.

For decades, Oklahoma City’s low density development patterns, and its related dependence upon cars, has contributed to environmental degradation and the loss of natural resources, habitats and valuable agricultural land. Two Plan Elements, **sustainokc** and **greenokc**, emphasize the need for incentives and regulations that protect “Environmentally Sensitive Areas,” encouraging development that is more efficient to service and sensitive to its environmental impact.

Historic Preservation is an important but often overlooked tool for promoting sustainability at a citywide scale. As recognized by a 2013 U.S. Green Building Council report titled “LEED for Neighborhood Development and Historic Preservation,” reuse of existing, historic neighborhoods uses existing transportation and utility infrastructure. In addition, historic neighborhoods are often more dense, compact, and walkable, perpetuating a more sustainable lifestyle for residents.

In addition to using established neighborhoods and their existing infrastructure, preservation also protects natural and rural character that is historically significant in its own right. “Historic resources” include rural farmsteads and the context of their agricultural surroundings. Even natural areas exhibiting minimal human disturbance, such as prairie lands traditionally used for grazing, or the historic Cross Timbers that defined Oklahoma Territory for early explorers, are part of our city’s history. Preserving the rural and undeveloped portions of Oklahoma City for their historic and cultural significance reinforces the City’s goals to protect our natural resources.

plan**okc** also addresses the importance of increasing “green building practices,” encouraging more sustainable design. Historic preservation is inherently more sustainable than even the “greenest” new construction project. According to the “LEED for Neighborhood Development and Historic Preservation” report, historic buildings contain “embodied energy,” meaning

the energy and resources used in the manufacturing, transport, and assembly of the original construction. Reuse of these buildings takes advantage of that embodied energy. Demolition wastes it.

Beyond the loss of embodied energy, demolition of existing structures creates additional waste by depositing tons of debris in landfills. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the demolition of a single, 1,600 square foot house puts 127 tons of debris in a landfill. A 2011 study by the National Trust for Historic Preservation found that it can take between 10 and 80 years for a new, “energy efficient” building to overcome the climate change impacts of its construction, including demolition, the manufacture and transportation of materials, and the construction process.

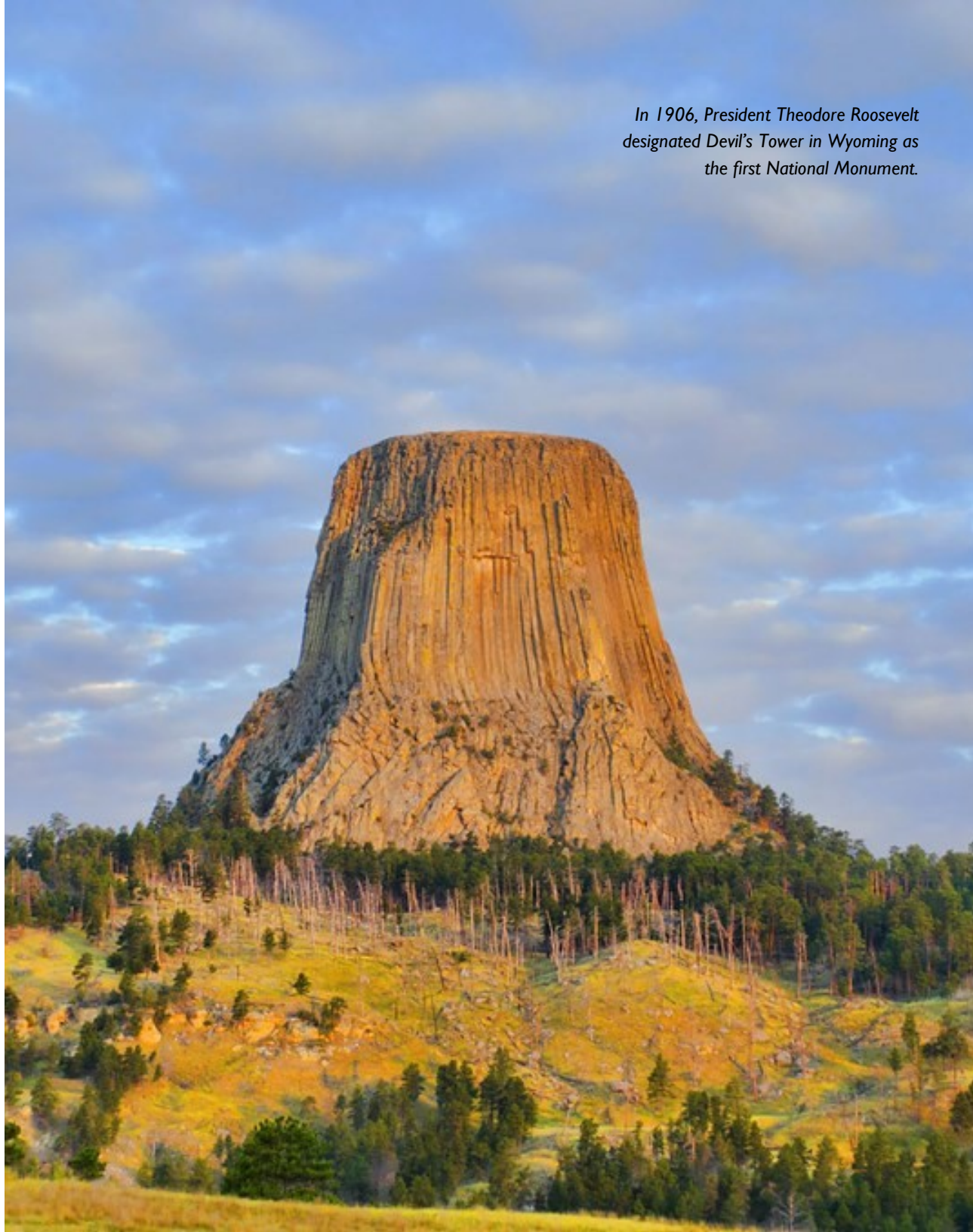
It is often assumed that the savings created by an energy-efficient building compared to an old building outweighs these environmental costs. However, historic buildings offer efficiencies inherent in their design that tip the balance in favor of adaptive reuse. The LEED report notes that buildings constructed prior to the advent of modern HVAC systems took advantage of heat, shade, and natural ventilation through their design, modeling the “passive design principles” now coming back into popularity. The 2011 National Trust report compared the reuse of historic buildings with new construction of comparable size and function, and found that “building reuse almost always offers environmental savings over demolition and

new construction.” Further, it is possible to make additional energy-efficiency upgrades to existing buildings, and even qualify for LEED certification in a historic rehabilitation, while retaining the building’s historic character.

The retention, repair, and recycling of our established built environment aligns perfectly with efforts to create a more sustainable city.

The greenest building is the one that’s already built.

- Carl Elefante, FAIA
2018 President of the American
Institute of Architects

A photograph of Devil's Tower National Monument in Wyoming. The tower is a large, isolated, igneous rock formation with a flat top and steep, eroded sides. It is surrounded by a dense forest of evergreen trees on a grassy slope. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt designated Devil's Tower in Wyoming as the first National Monument.

Regulatory Basis for Historic Preservation

Historic preservation has been an established field for well over a century, with the acquisition and restoration of George Washington's Mount Vernon by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association in 1858 often identified as one of the first true historic preservation efforts in the U.S.

By the turn of the 20th Century, what had largely been a private activity in the United States began to gain some regulatory teeth. Teddy Roosevelt championed the **Antiquities Act** of 1906, establishing the first federal protection for "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest," and creating the first National Monuments. This was followed by the **1935 Historic Sites Act**, establishing "a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States."

In these same decades, the use of zoning by municipalities grew increasingly sophisticated, addressing not only land use but also physical form, character, and quality of life. As early as the 1930s, the cities of **Charleston** and **New Orleans** created the first locally regulated historic districts in the country.

The rapid transformation of development patterns, transportation systems, building methods and materials, and lifestyle in general following World War II stirred an increased interest in historic preservation. At the federal

level, massive undertakings like the construction of the interstate highway system cleared paths across the continent, destroying historic sites that stood in the way. At the local level, cities across the country saw grand historic structures and established neighborhoods cleared as “blight,” all in the name of modernization and progress.

In 1965, the United States Conference of Mayors’ **Special Committee on Historic Preservation** published a book titled *With Heritage So Rich*, calling for a “new preservation”:

“If the preservation movement is to be successful...it must go beyond saving occasional historic houses and opening museums. It must be more than a cult of antiquarians. It must do more than revere a few precious national shrines. It must attempt to give a sense of orientation to our society, using structures and objects of the past to establish values of time and place.”

Following on the heels of that publication, the **National Historic Preservation Act** of 1966 established a system for identifying and recording historic and archeological resources, and for evaluating and minimizing the effects of federal activities on those resources.

Locally, many cities began to establish their own ordinances for historic preservation, designating districts and buildings as historic. Cases like **Penn Central Transportation Company v. New York City** made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978, establishing a strong legal basis for local historic preservation ordinances.

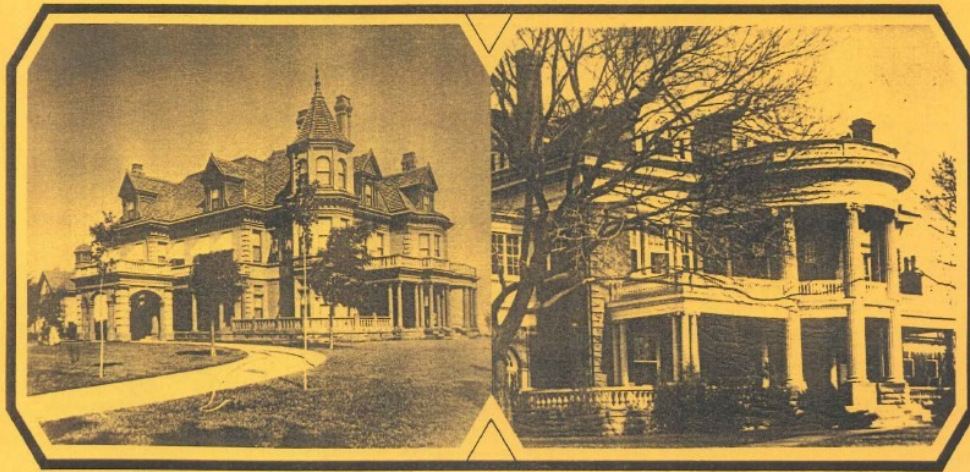
Tomorrow’s City...



...Is Being Born Today

“Tomorrow’s City...is Being Born Today” claims a 1970s publication of the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority, noting that “entire blocks of buildings, some dating back almost to the hectic Land Run of ‘89, have been leveled.” The publication features before-and-after images of downtown in the midst of clearance, paired with renderings of anticipated transformations.

In many cities, dramatic clearance of downtowns and neighborhoods sparked a concern for the loss of the historic character and a desire to see that important places be preserved.



PRESERVING THE HERITAGE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

CITY OF OKLAHOMA CITY, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

FEBRUARY, 1967

Heritage Hills

In 1969, the neighborhood that would come to be known as Heritage Hills became the state of Oklahoma's first locally-protected historic preservation district. Once home to the founding fathers and political leaders of Oklahoma City, the neighborhood saw increasing commercial encroachment and conversion of large, stately homes to other uses throughout the middle of the 20th century. With the support of Mayor Shirk, the city created a new zoning district and established Heritage Hills as the first "historic and architectural district."

The neighborhood went beyond zoning protections to collectively invest in dilapidated buildings, public spaces like parks, and their neighborhood school. Neighborhood coordination and activism, paired with a national movement to better identify and protect architectural heritage, paved the way for what is now one of the city's most celebrated preservation success stories.

Oklahoma City's Historic Preservation Program

Oklahoma City fits neatly within the national timeline of local historic preservation efforts. Though downtown Oklahoma City was in the midst of a massive urban renewal effort, initial interest in historic preservation came from historic neighborhoods. Residents were concerned about commercial encroachment, conversion of historic homes into boarding houses, and other indicators of decline.

In 1966, Mayor George Shirk directed the City Planning Department to prepare a study for the creation of a historic preservation commission. A 1967 report titled "Preserving the Heritage of Oklahoma City" led to the establishment of Oklahoma City's Historic Preservation Commission and the first local historic district in Oklahoma in 1969. Additional historic districts followed, including Putnam Heights in 1972 and Crown Heights and Edgemere Park in 1977.

Even as other zoning tools were developed, Historic Preservation and Historic Landmark District designation continued to be a vital tool for the rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods throughout Oklahoma City. Mesta Park, Jefferson Park, Paseo, and Heritage Hills East combined historic designation with other zoning tools such as Urban and Neighborhood Conservation District overlays in order to encourage revitalization.

The first Historic Preservation and Landmark districts in Oklahoma City focused primarily on residential neighborhoods. However, early efforts by the HP Commission to recognize individual structures as historical sites through the honorary

placement of plaques identified dozens of significant properties. Some of these went on to be rezoned as Historic Landmarks, including a former Wells Fargo Livery Stable, an African American Church important to the Civil Rights Movement, and Union Soldiers Cemetery for veterans of the Union Army.

Oklahoma City Today

Historic preservation in Oklahoma City continues to expand beyond the established districts. Oklahoma City became a Certified Local Government in 1991, working with the State Historic Preservation Office to carry out historic surveys, prepare National Register nominations, provide educational activities, and develop this plan.

“Design Review Districts” in key commercial areas across Oklahoma City, though not specifically focused on historic preservation, identify the redevelopment and preservation of historic and architectural resources as a priority. Oklahoma City’s Commercial District Revitalization Program and Strong Neighborhoods Initiative do not have a regulatory component, but act as resources for the revitalization of numerous historic areas.

Though not always the focal point, historic preservation continues to be an important component of numerous other City activities, from the use of wide ranging federal funding sources to rehabilitation of historic homes, to the rehabilitation and reuse of City-owned historic buildings.



Oklahoma City’s Historic Landmarks Program

Shortly after its formation, the Historic Preservation Commission began a process of identifying local landmarks through honorary recognition and placement of plaques on buildings identifying them as historic sites. It quickly became apparent that another tool was needed to truly preserve individual landmarks. In 1979, an ordinance creating the Historic Landmark overlay zoning was adopted.

From early efforts to save the 1910 Hales Building (demolished through Urban Renewal in 1979), to the consideration of the historic significance of the Walnut Avenue Bridge (saved from demolition in the 1990s), the Commission has used this tool to facilitate public discourse on the importance of historic resources to our community.