



Statewide Themes & Issues

The following themes and issues represent the analysis of the results of the statewide historic preservation plan's survey and engagement events. They form the basis for the Areas of Importance in the statewide plan's action agenda.

Themes

The following themes reflect broad trends about historic places and archaeological sites and historic preservation throughout the commonwealth. Several themes identified in the most recent statewide historic preservation plan, #PreservationHappensHere, continue to be relevant.

Community

Community, as it relates to this plan, is used broadly to mean a group of people who share a connection through geography, place, demographics, work, values, beliefs, and practices.

- Historic preservation builds, enhances, and strengthens community identity, and helps to create a sense of place.
- Engaging people is an important part of belonging and inclusion for all members of the community. Connections to historic places are realized through storytelling, sharing memories, and community conversations. Community is strengthened when people are more engaged with one another. Pennsylvanians across the Commonwealth in rural, suburban, and urban communities value historic preservation as an important part of enhancing and building community.
- Community is threatened when the historic places that define a community's identity and its character are lost.
- Partnerships between private entities, such as advocacy and non-profit organizations, and public agencies provide communities with the greatest access to historic preservation tools and inclusion in historic preservation activities. This results in some of the Commonwealth's strongest preservation outcomes.

Context

In preservation, context helps people understand the forces and factors that have influenced history and the historic places that reflect that history. Context provides the background for what is happening in the present. It allows people to understand where they live and why things have happened and can help them make informed decisions.

- Historic places and the stories they embody overwhelmingly contribute to a sense of place, which is an important component of a community's context.
- Pennsylvanians want to better understand and communicate how historic preservation can allow for a better understanding of their community's context and making connections between the past, present, and future.



- Archaeological investigations contribute to understanding Pennsylvania’s developmental history, especially for historically marginalized groups, but this information has not always been widely disseminated to all Pennsylvanians.
- People find historic preservation confusing and/or intimidating and can struggle to understand its role in providing context for a community and its historic places.
- There is a disconnect between preservation advocates and the broader community, which has resulted in historic preservation being sidelined due to a lack of understanding of historic context and the importance of preservation as a community planning tool.

Economic Opportunity

The theme of economics and economic opportunity continues to be important to Pennsylvanians and evolves with each new plan. In 2018, the theme of Economics was concerned with changing demographics and how this negatively affected historic buildings and communities; how the economic health of a community directly influences preservation activities; how developers should be viewed as a partner; and to create an atmosphere where the creative reuse of older and historic properties is feasible and sustainable.

In 2024:

- Housing affordability is a common issue across Pennsylvania and the preservation and reuse of older, historic buildings presents opportunities to develop more housing.
- Local economic development practices are not taking advantage of the opportunities provided by historic preservation and adaptive re-use methods.
- Workforce development and skill training are an underutilized opportunity that could benefit both the labor market and preservation throughout Pennsylvania.
- Promoting preservation as a way to enhance the economic vitality and community character of a place can help shift current public perceptions about preservation that can sometimes center on the notion of “maintaining old things.”

Education

The theme of education continues to be important to Pennsylvanians and evolves with each new plan. In 2018, this theme focused on three ways education was needed: promote awareness and benefits to non-traditional audiences, integrate preservation and historic place coursework into K-12 curriculums, and provide tools for people to discuss historic preservation.

In 2024:

- Pennsylvanians are concerned that their children are not learning about the history of the Commonwealth (including local and regional history) in school.
- Elected officials across Pennsylvania would benefit from education and outreach about historic preservation and the economic, social, and cultural value it brings to communities.
- Many communities lack awareness about the positive impacts of preservation on the long-term viability of a community.



- Pennsylvanians place more emphasis on training rather than education related to historic preservation practice as they want to be more engaged in advocating for and preserving historic places and archaeological sites.

Incentives

The theme of Incentives continues to be important to Pennsylvanians and evolves with each new plan. In 2018, the theme of incentives focused on several needs including those for funding and financial support, more education about available incentives, and improvements to the state historic tax credit, loan funds, and grants.

In 2024:

- Preservation of historic places – at all levels – from homeowners to businesses, non-profit organizations, and agencies would benefit from new incentives and programs to realize broader preservation outcomes throughout Pennsylvania.
- State policy updates can aid in rehabilitation and re-use of historic buildings and enhance the environmental and economic benefits of historic preservation.
- Incentives for preservation align with other community goals and can be leveraged through all avenues available, including advocacy organizations, Pennsylvania Heritage Areas, and economic development organizations.
- Pennsylvania can benefit from incentivizing the sharing and leveraging of resources, including financial, volunteer, staffing, spaces, and equipment.

Planning

The theme of Planning continues to be important to Pennsylvanians and evolves with each new plan. In 2018, the theme of Planning focused on the need for planning in small towns and rural areas, the need for greater collaboration on the state level, and that advocacy was occurring too late as the public perceives that historic places are protected.

In 2024:

- There is a perception across Pennsylvania that planning on a regional and local scale does not address the challenges and needs of historic preservation. Preservation policy currently exists in its own category and is not integrated into all planning policy on local, regional, or state levels.
- Zoning codes and comprehensive plans have not been updated regularly across Pennsylvania and many elected officials are not prioritizing updates to policies and codes to ensure they reflect the needs of the community and historic places and archaeological sites.
- Throughout Pennsylvania, some local governments are not in compliance with the Municipalities Planning Code, which requires all counties and municipalities to include provisions for preserving historic places and archaeological sites in their comprehensive plans and zoning.
- Many communities are not aware of or utilizing the policies and tools that are available to their municipalities which can create preservation outcomes.

Sustainability



Sustainability is a long-term goal that involves working towards the overall health of the Earth and environment for current and future generations. It has three components: economic, social, and environmental, which collectively contribute to the preservation of the built environment. Preservation is a proactive tool that can reduce the carbon footprint and the total amount of greenhouse gases generated by our actions, as reusing existing buildings rather than replacing them avoids the carbon emissions that occur during new construction.

- Adapting and reusing historic buildings has many environmental benefits. For example, existing materials and historic fabric are retained instead of being discarded into a landfill.
- Owners of historic buildings want reliable information to assist them with strategies that make their properties more sustainable, energy efficient, and resilient while retaining the historic character and fabric of the building.
- The ways in which Pennsylvanians buy goods has changed and led to a gradual abandonment of brick-and-mortar stores that struggle to compete with online marketplaces, which has resulted in historic buildings being abandoned and new warehouses being built.
- Construction of alternative energy sources, like wind, solar, and nuclear, provide environmentally sustainable power but may require the demolition of historic places, loss of archaeological sites, and visual disruptions to the landscape.

Issues

Pennsylvania continues to face issues related to the practice of historic preservation and the preservation of historic places and archaeological sites. While each part of Pennsylvania has its own unique circumstances, they share similar challenges. In the coming decade, addressing these shared issues will strengthen historic preservation practice and communities across the Commonwealth.

Access

Access is the ability of private citizens and laypersons, advocacy organizations, non-profits, and local governments to navigate the preservation process and obtain information, grant funding, researching resources, and state and federal requirements to utilize historic preservation tools.

- Across Pennsylvania, more inclusive access to historic places, to processes and programs that support historic preservation, to information and historical records, and to professional assistance and funding are widely needed. Access needs include, and are not necessarily limited to, workforce (paid and volunteer), materials, skilled trades, grant writers, and grant matching funds.
- Across the commonwealth, Pennsylvanians from a diverse range of communities and organizations cite the lack of funding as a significant barrier. Funding is needed to support brick-and-mortar projects as well as to expanded financial programs to cover operational costs for organizations to maintain their historic places, to support operational capacity, to advocacy and youth education programs.
- There are levels of complexity to the bureaucratic process of historic preservation at all levels that create barriers to access for Pennsylvanians to become involved in the practice of preservation.
- Groups working throughout Pennsylvania require funding and technical assistance to uncover, document and preserve underrepresented and undocumented histories and resources. Underrepresented resources are defined as historic properties that are not well represented in



Pennsylvania's Historic Places Inventory by their ethnic, cultural and/or historical association(s) and/or property type.

Apathy

In this plan, apathy presents as an overall lack of interest in the built environment, history, and the larger community.

- Across Pennsylvania, preservation's inaccessibility, both real and perceived, contributes to apathy in citizens who are unfamiliar with historic preservation practices and bureaucratic procedures. In many cases, people who are interested in preservation or those trying to advocate for a historic place get discouraged, which creates a sense of defeat that translates to apathy because preservation is too difficult and not worth the challenge.
- Lack of leadership on historic preservation matters at a local level can lead to apathy amongst the general public.
- A cumbersome and time-consuming process to achieve preservation successes can remove preservation as a priority for communities.
- In many communities there is a lack of knowledge of local history and a lack of encouragement in schools to learn or understand it. This results in a detached and apathetic audience.

Climate Change

A changing climate, which includes more frequent and severe flooding, increased rain volumes and intensity, and higher temperatures, impacts historic places, archaeological sites, and communities throughout every region in Pennsylvania.

- Factors impacting climate change in Pennsylvania is the Commonwealth's geography and building stock. The extensive network of waterways were the first super highways, meaning many Pennsylvania communities are located in flood prone areas. Pennsylvania has abundant natural resources to produce and supply power, from coal to natural gas, to wind and water. As one of the oldest, largest, and most populous states in the US, the majority of Pennsylvania's buildings were built over 50 years ago, primarily between 1850 and 1950.
- Federal and state requirements to address the changing climate can threaten the historic character of a place or a community. Energy efficiency standards can threaten the historic character of buildings. On a larger scale, new flood plains can result in the loss of an entire historic neighborhood.
- For buildings, the installation of new features or systems related to flood mitigation, severe weather events, or higher temperatures can remove or significantly alter historic fabric, which results in changes to a building's character. Accommodating these new elements can make it difficult to reuse a historic building.
- On a larger scale, a climate event or measures to proactively mitigate future climate events can change an area's landscape and historic character. Flooding can cause erosion in areas close to rivers, streams and lakes in Pennsylvania, which affect adjacent historic places and archaeological sites. The creation of new flood plains can result in the loss of a historic neighborhood or industrial complexes.
- Alternative energy sources, which can provide numerous benefits, such as wind and solar also create visual impacts to the landscape, might also result in the demolition of historic places and destroy archaeological sites.



- Resiliency is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to climate events and is often not addressed in current community and regional plans.

Development

Development pressures relate to two different types of places: existing developed land occupied by older and historic buildings or historically open space (fields and forests) in suburban and rural areas.

- Development pressures resulting in demolition and replacing the older, historic built environment with new construction remains a consistent threat to historic places, archaeological sites, and communities throughout Pennsylvania.
- Current zoning practices can encourage density at the expense of historic properties. Lack of planning for preservation has created an environment where historic places can be demolished without any opportunity for community comment. Demolition by neglect, a practice that allows a building to deteriorate until it can no longer be saved, is also a pressing issue.
- Many communities struggle with providing ample affordable housing, even those with declining populations. The need for this type of housing is often used as an argument against preservation. The reasons cited include the perceived cost and impracticalities of adaptively reusing an existing building, gentrification, and local not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) culture.
- Pressure from new land development is threatening historic agricultural lands, farms, archaeological sites, and open space throughout Pennsylvania, posing a significant risk to the environment and community identity.

Preservation Trades

Preservation trades are defined as traditional building trades and include masonry, roofing, metal working, carpentry, plasterwork, and painting.

- The number of skilled workers in the traditional preservation trades is dwindling, making maintenance difficult and often unattainable for owners of historic properties.
- Lack of skilled workers or lack of access to skilled workers makes it more difficult and expensive to maintain properties, particularly for homeowners in regulated historic districts that do not have access to sources of public funding.
- This is an ongoing concern across Pennsylvania as the loss of skills and knowledge of the historic building process contributes to an overall loss of the historic built environment and therefore the community.
- Across all regions, private homeowners of older buildings continue to find it difficult to afford routine maintenance. Deferred maintenance, over time, threatens a home's historic character if original or historic features and materials need to be removed or replaced.

Reuse

Reuse of historic buildings for new purposes addresses community needs, contributes to community pride, and the overall sense of place and identity. It also boosts housing supply, promotes sustainability best practices, and revitalizes communities.

- Local ordinances often make adaptive reuse more complicated than the process of demolishing a building.



PLANNING FOR PRESERVATION IN PENNSYLVANIA, 2024 – 2034

SURVEY → OUTREACH → ANALYSIS → RESULTS

- Reuse is often harder to accomplish due to a lack of access to skilled labor or workers, fewer incentives for reuse, and a positive cultural association with new things that favors demolition and new construction.