

Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor Lott and City Councilors
From: Heather Carrington, Community & Economic Development Officer
Date: 5/29/19

RE: Historic Preservation

The need for an effective and unified approach to historic preservation in Winooski has been a central discussion in the community in recent months. The Planning Commission has recommended prioritizing historic preservation over the coming year. This memo is intended to serve as a high level briefing on possible approaches to historic preservation in Winooski, should Council identify historic preservation as a strategic priority.

Currently, there are two national register listed historical districts in Winooski: Winooski Falls Mills Historic District and the Leclair Avenue Historical District. In addition, there is an archeological site and five national register listed individual buildings. There are additional buildings listed on the state register, as well as further buildings that are eligible for listing.

It is a commonly held misconception that listing on the National or State Register of Historic Places prevents a historic property from being altered or demolished. Register listing is, in fact, an honorific which places no restrictions on what can be done to a property by its owner. It provides no protections or assurances that a property will be preserved. If a project involves federal or state funding, licenses or permits, the Vermont State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) must review the effects to historic and cultural resources, but review does not assure any protective actions. Some measure of protection can be provided through local preservation ordinances, and a still greater degree of protection can be ensured through preservation easements. Several potential approaches are elaborated below.

Local Government vs. Community-Based Approaches

There are several potential approaches to historic preservation initiatives in Winooski. Some efforts require implementation by local government, while others are better-suited to grassroots or non-profit organizations. For example, a preservation ordinance would be established through local government, while preservation easements or creation of a historic preservation trust organization would be initiated by community grassroots efforts. Staff would be happy to research any of these approaches, or others, to provide further information at City Council's direction.



Local Government Based Approaches

1. Apply for Certified Local Government Status

The Vermont Certified Local Government Program (CLG) is focused on promoting historic preservation through grants and access to technical assistance. CLG matching grants are generally between \$5,000 and \$10,000, but recent awards have been up to \$30,000. These grants are a 60/40 grant, requiring 40% local match, and can be used to fund a wide variety of local preservation projects including (but not limited to):

- Architectural, historical, archeological surveys, and oral histories that help identify significant properties
- Preparation and nominations to the National Register of Historic Places
- Writing or amending preservation ordinances
- Preparation of preservation plans
- Development and publication of walking tours

*Grant funds are only available for brick and mortar projects on register-listed buildings that are owned by the municipality.

2. Establish a Qualified Historic Preservation Commission

An historic preservation commission could potentially be charged with taking the lead role in planning and advocacy for the protection of Winooski's historic and architecturally significant resources.

3. Develop a Local Preservation Ordinance

The Planning Commission could be directed to develop a preservation ordinance or a historic overlay district in the city.

4. Complete a Survey and Inventory of Local Historic Resources

Grant funding through the CLG program or through the Municipal Planning Grant program could cover the cost of hiring a consultant, or the City could work with graduate students from the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Vermont.

6. Apply for State and Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits in support of preservation projects.

Community-Based Approaches

1. Establish a Winooski Historic Preservation Non-Profit Organization

2. Establish a Winooski Historic Preservation Trust or Land Bank

3. Engage with Preservation Trust of Vermont to Pursue Historic Preservation Easements in partnership with property owners

