



Guide to Community Action for Threatened Historical Sites

1. Do your Homework - Don't be caught with incomplete or inaccurate information. Find out the essential information about the property in question as a basis for your advocacy:

- Identify the owner of the property.
- Answer the who, what, when, where, and why questions about the building, especially its date of construction and original use.
- Assess the significance of the property; determine if it has any "official" status, such as National Register listing or eligibility, or local designation.
- If the property has "official status" become familiar with the accepted way such properties should be treated, including the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and local Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) guidelines.
- Determine what zoning ordinances, building permits, and variances affect or are required for the proposed project.
- Assess the physical condition of the property and the likelihood of long-term preservation.
- Establish the fair market value of the property as background information.

2. Identify the Threat to the Property - The type of threat indicates what additional information is needed and suggests a course of action to pursue.

- Proposed demolition (including the disturbance or destruction of archaeological sites)
 - Evaluate potential replacement development. Will it meet current zoning? Is the property in question the genuinely best site? What investment will it generate?
 - Determine sources of financing for demolition and new construction. Are public dollars involved? Is private financing secured? What is the source of private financing?
 - Identify any local, state and/or federal permits needed for the project.
- Neglect
 - Check with existing municipal codes to verify any noncompliance.
 - Review the owner's record with other properties to identify a pattern of neglect, if appropriate.
 - Review the owner's property tax record for this property. Are the taxes paid?
- Incompatible Use
 - Review existing municipal zoning ordinance to identify whether the proposed use is permitted by the code.
 - Evaluate the proposed project's impact on the neighborhood in terms of traffic, parking, commercial versus residential activity, visual character, etc.

3. Review Regulatory Framework - Determine what land use or other regulatory procedures are involved and might highlight the need to consider historic resources.

- Federal funding, licensing or permitting requires Section 106 Review under the National Historic Preservation Act.

- Determine which agency is involved in the undertaking and which local agency is taking the lead.
- Identify your organization as an interested public party.
- Review Section 106 evaluations and recommendations under the public involvement provisions of Section 106.
- If Section 106 work has not been initiated, lobby for its need with the agency and with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
- Inquire about the preparation of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
 - These documents must address archaeological, historical, and architectural resources.
 - Public access to these documents is required and public comment is desired.
- If the property is locally designated, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) reviews the project.
 - If the project has not yet been reviewed, communicate your interest in the property and concerns about the resource.
 - If the project has been reviewed, examine the records of the meeting and learn how the issues were discussed.
- Zoning variances, building permits, other municipal regulations.
 - Determine what types of permits have been applied for and review the applications.
 - The granting of a zoning variance or other local permit requires a public hearing and vote by the appropriate municipal body.
 - If the public hearing has not yet been held, attend and testify.
 - If the public hearing has been held, review the records for the event and submit written comments, if possible.
 - Communicate your concern to the body that will vote on the permit or variance.

4. Evaluate Your Position - Have a realistic idea of what you are up against and who might help with the advocacy project.

- Evaluate the climate of opinion in your community.
 - Determine if there is any organizational support for preservation in general and/or the preservation of this property.
 - Identify any neighborhood support for preservation and/or the preservation of this property.
 - Assess if there is any government, community, business, or media support for preservation and/or for this property.
- Determine the timeframe for action.
 - Find out specific dates for municipal review and the permit process.
 - Determine the timeframe for state/federal review and granting of permits.
 - Determine the projected project timetable.
- Make sure you know the process for project approval.
- Identify allies.
 - Build support for your advocacy project.
 - Learn who is in support of the developer's project.
 - Identify each player's self interest in the property.

5. Identify Goals - Make sure you understand the range of goals that can be associated with an advocacy project.

- Consider these outcomes as potential goals for your advocacy issue:

- Save a historic property.
- Influence a design/planning decision in your community.
- Increase your community's understanding of preservation issues.
- Gain new members or build support for your preservation organization.
- Encourage updated land use planning in your community.
- Encourage protective legislation at the local or state level.
- What can be accomplished?
 - Relative to the specific property:
 - Is the goal to prevent demolition?
 - Is the goal to modify plans for redevelopment?
 - Is the goal to have a historic building restored?
 - Relative to the community:
 - Could the property be considered a community resource?
 - Will the advocacy project generate community awareness of preservation?
 - Will your efforts encourage new legislation?
 - Relative to your preservation organization:
 - Will this advocacy project increase public support?
 - Will this advocacy project position the organization better for the next issue?
 - Does this advocacy project have the potential for fundraising for your organization?
 - Will this advocacy project raise the profile of preservation within your community?

6. Tell Everyone - Identify key stakeholders and allied organizations that would have an interest in helping.

- Invoke the public involvement provisions for the relevant regulatory processes.
 - Let the appropriate agency know you are interested in the issue.
 - Let the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) know you are interested in the issue.
- Call and write letters to elected officials of your local governments.
- Inform the staff members of local departments and agencies of your interest.
- Write a persuasive letter to the editor of the local newspaper.
- Issue a well-crafted press release to the media to raise awareness of your advocacy issue.

7. Explore Alternatives with the Owner/Developer - Request a meeting with the property owner and/or developer framed as an opportunity to consider various alternatives for the property.

- Prepare to negotiate.
 - Do not assume that the other side is determined to do what you fear most.
 - Visualize the best and worst case scenarios.
 - Research the economic advantages of preservation.
 - Historic rehabilitation tax credits
 - Preservation easement donation
 - Financial involvement of government or non-profit organization
 - Acquisition financing at below market rates
 - Construction financing at below market rates
 - Grants
- Public relations
 - Prepare a short (1-3 page) position statement.
 - Select a negotiating team and appoint its chairperson.

- Select members with special skills and influence, e.g., attorneys, architects, planners, developers, etc.
 - Recommend a neutral location for meeting.
- Negotiate.
 - Distinguish people from the problem.
 - Listen to the other side's interests.
 - Treat the other side's concerns with respect.
 - Avoid emotional outbursts and do not react to those of others at the table.
 - Establish a flexible position.
 - Focus on the desired goal, not your bargaining position.
 - Recognize each side's multiple interests.
 - Identify shared interests.
 - Avoid debate; seek dialogue.
 - Don't be a victim.
 - Question "phony" facts.
 - Be prepared to present alternative statements to counter those of biased "experts."
 - Be aware that the other side might not fully disclose its plans.

8. Prepare for Conflict - A contentious preservation advocacy battle requires organization and good communication.

- Review the organization and communication skills of your preservation group. Critically look at it from an outsider's perspective and improve as needed.
- Shape an advocacy message that is clear, concise, and compelling as it relates why your group is taking its position.
- Secure the support of other organizations and establish a network of allies.
- Estimate realistic time and money commitments expected of the organization and its volunteers.
- Appoint a coordinator.

9. Plan for Victory - Focus on knowledge and communication.

- Develop a case for your cause.
 - Prepare a concise 1 page position paper.
 - Review and improve the position paper prepared in the negotiation phase.
 - Gather information on successful similar preservation efforts.
 - Prepare an economic case for preservation; consider downtown revitalization, heritage tourism, increased value of housing stock, etc.
 - Prepare a community case for preservation; consider retaining a sense of place, forging tangible links between the past and present, etc.
- Present positive, well-researched testimony.
 - Have the facts about:
 - The significance of the building
 - The actual condition of the building, and how it got that way (e.g. did the present owner fail to maintain it?)
 - Cost of improvements
 - Practical reuse alternatives
 - Realistic funding sources
 - Cite positive examples.
 - Prepare hand-outs.
 - Prepare visuals.

- Secure experts.
- Generate positive media coverage.
 - Identify personable spokesperson.
 - Prepare professional-quality visuals.
 - Write professional-quality press releases.
 - Package events to be attractive to the media.
- Involve the public.
 - Circulate a petition.
 - Stage events such as tours, public meetings, and vigils.
 - Secure endorsements from influential people.
- Involve politicians.
 - Create photo opportunities.
 - Stage events.
- Consider litigation.
- Keep the public and your organization informed of progress.

10. Live with the Results - Always keep the long-term goal of better protection for historic resources and more informed land use planning in mind as you work on a preservation advocacy issue. Be prepared to lose the battle but win the war if the loss of one building results in the protection of many others.

11. Prevent the Next Crisis

- Use the momentum of the crisis to continue the preservation dialogue in your community.
- Establish a local preservation non-profit group so preservationists are easily organized around the next issue.
- Start a Heritage Preservation Commission to designate and protect historic resources.
- Develop a Main Street program for your downtown.
- Work on the statewide or national level to create preservation-friendly policies and laws.

Excerpted from *A Minnesota Guide to Community Action* with permission from The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, www.mnpreservation.org. *A Minnesota Guide to Community Action* was prepared by staff of The 106 Group, www.106group.com.