

# Historic Resources



City of Portland Bureau of  
**Planning and Sustainability**  
 Sam Adams, Mayor | Susan Anderson, Director

**H**istoric resources—buildings, districts, bridges, public art, landscapes, etc.—are structures and places that connect the past to the present. They enrich our built environment and public spaces, help define the character of our neighborhoods, and contribute to our sense of place. Historic preservation, in its broadest sense, is a collective endeavor that seeks to understand, protect and enhance these resources for ourselves and future generations.

This overview presents highlights of the Portland Plan Historic Resources Background Report, which forms a basis for understanding the role of historic buildings and places in shaping the city, and critical issues to consider as the Portland Plan unfolds.

Background research on Portland’s historic resources presents major issues relating to the current state of our historic buildings, neighborhoods, spaces and structures. The resulting *Historic Resources Background Report* consists of three major sections:

- **Key Findings and Recommendations**
- **Data and Maps**
- **Understanding Historic Resources in Portland**

With the Portland Region expecting population, housing and employment growth, we will face challenges to preserving historic resources and protecting and enhancing our historic and established neighborhoods. The City and its community partners will need to prioritize preservation efforts and be strategic about which projects to pursue. A key priority should be integrating preservation values into the Portland Plan and Comprehensive Plan update processes, while also balancing preservation goals with other policy goals. Collaboration among all stakeholders and community partners will be key to the success of these efforts.

## Key Observations

The historic preservation background research encompasses a wealth of detail about Portland’s historic buildings, neighborhoods, spaces and structures. The three research reports provide complementary information. Content of report 2, Data and Maps, is self-explanatory. Report 3, Understanding Historic Resources in Portland, details the role of various agencies, commissions and programs of the City of Portland government. It also outlines state and federal historic resources rules and benefits. Report 1, Key Findings and Recommendations, contains more general and introductory information, and is the main report from which the following Key Observations are summarized.

**Historic resources play a vital role in defining Portland’s sense of place and the character of its neighborhoods.** Portlanders place a great value on historic resources, not only designated landmarks and districts, but the established fabric of the city’s neighborhoods—its older buildings, structures and streetscapes that may not (yet) be formally designated as “historic,” but are central to the city’s distinctiveness and quality of life. More than 60 percent of the city’s buildings are at least 50 years old, and 35 percent are at least 75 years old, creating a vast pool of potentially significant historic resources. In addition to more than 670 individual historic landmarks, Portland has 20 historic and conservation districts, covering 1,500 acres and containing more than 3,500 contributing properties. The City’s Historic Resource Inventory, completed in 1984, includes 5,000 properties. Portland residents’ appreciation of the historic built environment is manifested in many ways, from strong citizen engagement in the historic design review process to grass roots projects to save threatened buildings and create new historic districts.

**Preserving historic resources is complex and must be balanced with other goals of the city.** One of our City’s challenges is to find ways to change and grow, while also preserving our historic resources and protecting the character of neighborhoods. Redevelopment pressure on designated and potentially significant historic resources is already evident in some neighborhoods and the scale and design of infill development is often controversial. In places expected to experience higher density and development in the future, the existing and historic built environment and landscape may be at additional risk. A balance between preservation goals and other policy objectives must be achieved, and tools must be developed to sensitively manage change.





**A new, “modern” history is emerging:** Much of Portland’s post-World War II modern architecture is now (or soon will be) old enough to apply for historic designation. These various mid-century buildings collectively represent the changing needs and lifestyles of the city at the time, and shifts in how the building industry addressed those needs, ranging from “suburban” housing developments to new special-purpose building types. Yet these mid-century resources are disappearing before they can be evaluated or considered for preservation. Portland has an inadequate inventory of these resources. Additional tools are needed to evaluate, protect and preserve them.

**East Portland is underserved by historic preservation research, policies and protections.** It has a substantially different history, identity and built and natural environment than the inner Portland neighborhoods which have long been the focus of preservation efforts. At the same time, East Portland is a focus of numerous local and regional growth policies and efforts encouraging redevelopment. Yet without an adequate inventory of potential historic resources and other evaluative tools, it is difficult to create policies, programs and projects that will help preserve desired aspects of the area’s historic fabric over time.

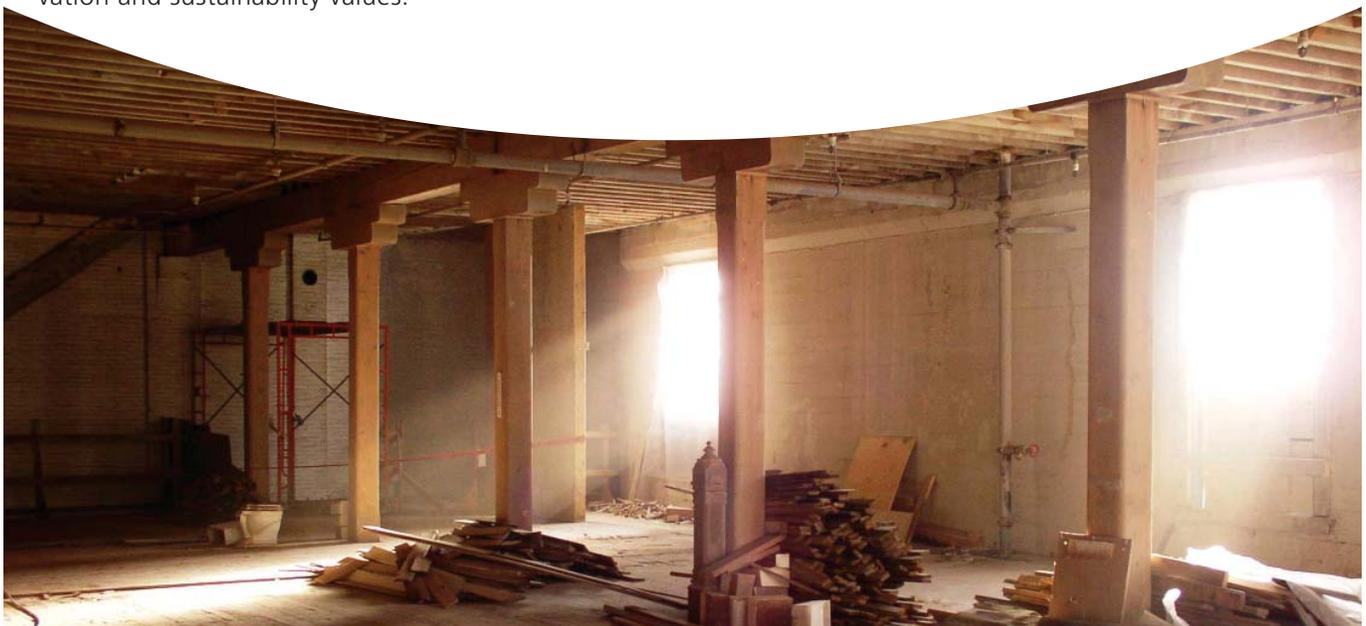
**Portland has an inadequate inventory of historic and archaeological resources and other tools.** Portland’s Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) is now a quarter century old and has many shortcomings. A large number of now potentially significant resources were not identified because they were not old enough at the time (1984) to be considered historic. many areas of the city and some types of structures were not well documented. Areas recently annexed to the City (namely East Portland) were not inventoried. Nor did the inventory address archaeological and culturally significant sites. Thus while an inventory of potentially significant buildings, structures, sites and landscapes is a fundamental building block for creating effective historic preservation policies, programs and projects, Portland lacks such a foundation.

**Historic preservation is sustainable development.** Preserving our city's historic resources can foster development that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Good building stewardship, re-use and rehabilitation are inherently sustainable practices. Older and historic buildings have intrinsic value in terms of their embodied energy, were often constructed from quality materials and represent durable assets.

**Portland has taken a leadership role in the sustainability movement and is recognized for a number of public and private sustainability initiatives.** The merger of the Bureau of Planning and the Office of Sustainable Development creates new opportunities to explore and improve the connections between preservation planning and sustainable development.

**Some issues and opportunities that have been identified regarding the connections between preservation planning and sustainable development include:**

- **The role of historic preservation in sustainable economic development.** Preservation and rehabilitation have demonstrable economic benefits to the community, such as spurring revitalization in surrounding areas, increasing the local tax base and creating heritage tourism opportunities.
- **The cultural and social value of historic buildings.** Historic buildings play an important role in enhancing community character and sense of place, preserving affordable housing and stabilizing property values, among other considerations that relate to the common good.
- **The suitability of historic structures for alternative energy production and other conservation technologies.** These modifications can help meet environmental goals and extend the useful life of a building, but if not sensitively executed may negatively impact the integrity and character of historic places. Creative approaches and collaboration can concretely demonstrate the connections between preservation and sustainability values.



## Recommendations

Improved preservation policies, tools and incentives are needed. Portland's tool kit of preservation policies, programs, regulations and incentives that support the preservation and enhancement of historic resources need to be reviewed and, where appropriate, revised and improved. Some identified issues include:

- effectiveness of preservation zoning incentives;
- lack of financial incentives;
- inconsistent and complex applicability and content of historic design guidelines and standards;
- barriers to designating local landmarks; and
- coordination of City historic resource functions.

**Integrate historic resources into the development of Portland's Strategic Plan.** Historic resources and their role in defining neighborhood typologies and pattern areas will be a fundamental layer used in determining "areas of stability and change" and other urban form and physical planning components of the Portland Plan strategic framework and subsequent implementation actions including the updated Comprehensive Plan. As plan concepts, goals and policies are developed, the City's existing historic preservation policy framework and tool kit should be evaluated. In the later stages of the process, preservation policies and implementation measures (e.g., zoning provisions and design guidelines) should be reviewed and revised in order to ensure that they address some of the existing challenges and opportunities outlined here.

**Pursue collaborative and strategic preservation research, education and policy development projects.** The list of Portland's preservation needs and challenges is extensive; however, the scope of the Portland Plan and available resources are limited. The City and its community partners will need to prioritize their preservation efforts and be strategic about the projects they pursue. There are a number of opportunities to meet multiple objectives and other policy goals at the same time.



## Ideas for suggested actions

Below are some possible avenues for focused approaches to addressing historic preservation needs.

- **Identify opportunities for targeted inventories of historic resources.** Comprehensively updating the HRI on a citywide level would require a considerable commitment of resources. A more strategic or phased approach to updating the HRI may need to be developed, such as targeting specific geographies or types or eras of resources. Partnerships with preservation and neighborhood groups will be required. City-owned historic resources should also be a priority for new inventory work. Existing inventories should be made more readily accessible to researchers and the public. New mapping and database tools can also assist in broadening understanding of historic resources citywide.
- **Pursue preservation projects in East Portland.** East Portland has few protected historic resources, lacks an adequate inventory and has had little historic preservation planning. New preservation initiatives in the area are called for, such as inventory and research, historic designation projects, and the development of preservation policies and strategies that respond to the distinctive attributes of East Portland.
- **Pursue projects that explore the significance of Modern architecture.** Even as a new wave of potentially significant architecture from the post-war era becomes eligible for historic designation, many examples are disappearing before they can be evaluated or considered for preservation. There is an inadequate inventory of these types of resources, and few tools to evaluate, protect and preserve them. The basic groundwork for a considered approach to protecting this very different universe of historic resources should be established.
- **Pursue strategies that capitalize on the nexus between historic preservation and sustainable development.** The City should work with local citizens and business, as well as federal, state, and local organizations, on initiatives that promote both preservation and sustainability. These range from tax credit programs and incentives that encourage historically appropriate rehabilitation and energy upgrades, to improved green-building rating systems. The integration of the City's long-range planning and sustainability programs in the new Bureau of Planning and Sustainability creates opportunities for new and improved projects that more fully incorporate historic preservation values and expertise with sustainability.