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CEP 508

2/9/21

Community Planning Problem Description

Development has become such an important part of today's world, which is a good thing as it means we are moving forward, but sometimes development is taking over everything. One problem that rises from over development is the loss of history in that region. An example of a place that this is happening in is Rochester, NH. Rochester is becoming more and more developed and causing some of its rich history to fade away. This is happening because historical buildings are being torn down and/or completely remodeled with no mention of the history behind the place. Development is important for growth but history and education on historic preservation is an extremely valuable aspect to any area.

Local history is important for numerous reasons. It teaches you about your community, social changes and impacts. The problems of past events and how they were either beneficial or a disaster that should never be repeated can also be revealed in the history of a place. The University of Toronto stated, "Learning about local history turns the grand patterns of historical change into concrete stories that tell of the lives of individuals. It is thus vital to increasing one's understanding of historical processes." Without looking into history and just removing it, people lose a sense of who they are and where they came from.

Historic preservation and education is now more important than ever. History is something that should never be forgotten. "Through historic preservation, we look at history in different ways, ask different questions of the past, and learn new things about our history and ourselves. Historic preservation is an important way for us to transmit our understanding of the past to future generations" (NPS). If we don't take part in historic preservation, future generations will know nothing about themselves, their families, areas in which they have lived, etc. Without historic preservation, the development will take over and the history of that place could be lost forever. We must implement more preservation and education into areas where development is occurring, as well as encouraging others to want to learn.

In 2019 the National Trust for Historic Preservation conducted a survey to find out what the top seven obstacles facing the field of Historic Preservation were. Number five was "Need to educate the next generation of preservationists, particularly in the preservation trades" (Webb). There is a need to educate the younger generation about history and teaching the value of

historic structures” (Web). Without a strong awareness of historic preservation then history will begin to be lost forever.

Rochester is an area that is becoming more and more developed and it is very possible that history can become lost. It is important that we restore the history in this area before it is too late. Some places have already become extremely developed and have lost some history, like Dover, NH, the town over from Rochester. Dover used to be a small and cute town with lots of history everywhere. Within the past 10 or so years, it has become overdeveloped with apartments everywhere. There are still some of the old mill buildings but there are no history placards anywhere, and a lot of people don't even realize how much history there is to Dover, they only care about more apartments. We want to stop this from happening in Rochester before it is too late.

Rochester is at a critical point in its development with hundreds of apartments planned to go in the Rochester Historic District in the next few years. If not done with historic preservation in mind then a lot of Rochester history could be lost forever. The main organization that's job is to preserve the historic district of Rochester is the Rochester Historic District Commission. But their job can be very hard when people do not “understand” historic preservation and/or the history of Rochester. The lack of awareness for historic preservation is a problem because of the absence of education that has led to an upward battle when they try to protect the Historic District. Molly Meulenbroek, the chair of the Historic District Commission for Rochester said “...Advocating for historic preservation in Rochester through local government is the primary role of the Historic District Commission. Rochester needs more avenues and organizations to educate the public on both the benefits of historic preservation and the historic assets in our local area. Without strong education of the public, it can be challenging to advocate for preservation”. She also said “I would say the lack of knowledge of historic preservation and local history in general is not unique to Rochester. That is an undercurrent in most places in the US. But this also provides an opportunity to invite additional groups to the discussion. This would make the understanding of local history far richer than the current narrative widely available”.

There are certain members of the community that think the Historic District Commission(HDC) is out of date. According to Matthew Winders, a member of the HDC, “When you explain what the HDC does and how it can be beneficial to the community, people's view of the HDC and historic preservation starts to change... I remember a conversation that I had with committee members where they said that the HDC was out of date and there was no point to historic preservation but when I pointed out the reason that the City Hall Annex was restored and not torn down the community members started to think maybe the committee still was

needed along with historic preservation". The root cause of the problem is the lack of awareness of historic preservation because once there is more education/awareness about historic preservation it will make it a lot easier to save the history of not just Rochester but everywhere. For example, when the committee members above "understood" what historic preservation could "do" they were more open to it. There are a few organizations that are trying to work on that issue in Rochester such as the Rochester Historic Society, the Rochester Historical Museum, HDC, and more. There is more that needs to be done because there is still a fight that needs to be fought to preserve history.

Rochester also does not have any historical markings that would help to educate citizens about the history of their city but also about the importance of historic preservation. According to the South Dakota state Historical Society "The historical marker program identifies historically significant buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts. ...Markers spark further interest in local history and can call attention to historic preservation efforts. They are well-documented histories, easily accessible to the public and reflect the importance a community places on its heritage" (South Dakota State Historical Society). Rochester does have organizations that do work to preserve the history of Rochester and work to educate the people about historic preservation but as stated by Molly the chair of the HDC of Rochester "Rochester needs more avenues and organizations".

Some homeowners don't know if they are living in a historic home but once they are educated about the history of the home they are more likely to take pride in it and want to preserve it. The director of Planning for the City of Rochester Shanna B. Saunders said that "When I was working for the city of Somersworth in their Planning department we had fact sheets for houses that were historic. Once I showed homeowners the fact sheet that proved their house was historic, they then took pride in the history of their house and then they were more apt to preserve it". The city of Rochester does not currently have that kind of information on many houses that can be used to educate homeowners about the history of their house. It is a problem because then the city doesn't have the information it needs to educate people. But that proves once people are educated then they would be more open to the idea of historic preservation.

The main problem is there is a lack of knowledge of historic preservation, leading people not to really care about their local history. As stated before, local history, or any history for that matter, is extremely important and is something that should not be lost due to development or lack of education. There needs to be more done to engage the people in historic preservation. The behaviors of the people in the city government and the citizens of Rochester indicate that

they would rather see the “old” torn down and the “new” put up. They don’t realize the “old can become the “new”. Once citizens are educated on historic preservation they will have more of a will to want to learn about the history in their area. This will also lead to less push-back when organizations try to preserve buildings or keep others from being demolished.

References

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