

Intro

Through our research we gathered information to answer the following research questions:

- How is the lack of awareness of historic preservation hindering historic preservation efforts in Rochester?
- What is the importance of historic preservation awareness?
- What can be done in Rochester to create a greater understanding of Historic Preservation?

We used three different research methods to try to answer the above questions. First, we conducted a focus group (qualitative date), next we conducted a key person interview (qualitative date), and lastly we analyzed documents that had to do with historic preservation (qualitative date).

Focus group

Description of Method: We facilitated a group of four different individuals that work in the field of historic preservation and one lay-person who also works in historic preservation. Those individuals were Molly Meulenbroek- Chair of the Rochester Historic District Commission, Nick Cracknell- Principal Planner for the City of Portsmouth NH, and the adviser to the Portsmouth Historic District Commission, Shanna Saunders- Director of Planning and Development for the city of Rochester, Brandee Loughlin- Preservation Planning & Development Coordinator New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, and Maggie Stier-Advancement Projects Coordinator NH Preservation Alliance. It was important to our research that we had professionals/lay people in the group that were from Rochester but also from surrounding areas. It was our hope that the professionals/lay people that came from out of town would bring new ideas to Rochester. We asked the members of the group about various aspects of historic preservation/historic preservation awareness and how it affected Rochester and how they thought it could be improved. The goal of the group was to foster conversation among different professionals/lay people that work within the field of Historic Preservation to bring about new ideas about how to approach historic preservation awareness in Rochester.

Summary of data: There was a lot of discussion about historic preservation awareness and how to get “by in” from more people. One of the biggest points that was brought up was that historic preservation needs to be presented in such a way that engages the public. Mr. Cracknell brought

up an example from Portsmouth. He shared that they have digitized their historic district into a 3D map where anyone can go online. They see the district in 3D, they can also see inside a few of the buildings. That is one way that Portsmouth presents the historic district to people.

Throughout the discussion the Historic District Commission (HDC) brought up that it is a critical part of historic preservation. That is because a lot of the time the only time people hear about historic preservation is when someone had a bad experience with the HDC, Mr. Cracknell explained. He and others in the group said it is critical for commission members to be properly trained because then they will be more likely to make “good” decisions which will help with the perception of the HDC and historic preservation. Ms. Stier said a key way to get the public involved in historic preservation and how it is conducted is by having public hearings and giving the people a chance to speak. One of the biggest problems is getting outside citizens to come to the meeting and speak at the meetings. Mr. Cracknell said Portsmouth has an awareness problem because they have almost no citizen engagement. Ms. Meulenbroek said that Rochester has the same problem. There was a consensus in the group that Rochester needs to come up with creative ways to engage the public and historic preservation. Some of the ideas that were brought up were recording the HDC meetings to make them more accessible to the public, having historic walks showcasing the history of Rochester, and adding information on coasters. The group discussed that a way for the HDC to spread awareness about historic preservation but also revamp their image at the same time would be for the commission to advocate for worthwhile projects around the city. Mr. Cracknell said that the fact that the local media has lessened coverage of historic preservation efforts, has hurt public involvement. Ms. Stier said that the key is for Rochester to find a way to get people involved. The most important sense of the group was that whatever Rochester does to try to get more public involvement is that it has to be different and creative. The group also discussed how Rochester needs more information on their historic district. That if there was a cut sheet of information on each building that could be shown to building owners they would be more willing to protect the history of their building. Ms. Saunders said that when the city she formerly worked for implemented cut sheets on their historic buildings, building owners were more likely to protect that history. Mr. Cracknell said that before you “market” your historic district you have to have a high functioning HDC without that your awareness efforts will fail.

Main Takeaways: Based on the highlights above we can conclude from the focus group about historic preservation awareness that there are many different aspects of it but the most important things are that Rochester needs to come up with a creative approach for historic preservation and need to make sure they have a strong HDC. Rochester has to have a strong HDC because according to the group people associate historic preservation with the HDC, so if the HDC is seen in a bad light so will historic preservation.

Citation: Information sourced from Historic Preservation Focus on March 23rd 2022

Focus Group Recording: Historic Preservation Focus Group

Interview

Description of Method: We decided to interview a citizen of Rochester, Jeff Bisson, an employee in downtown Rochester. It was important to include a citizen who is not a professional in the field because they can give us a different community perspective on historic preservation awareness in the City of Rochester. The goal of the interview was to gather information on what can be done to foster a greater understanding of historic preservation awareness in Rochester. Also to gather examples of how the lack of Historic Preservation Education has affected Historic Preservation efforts.

Summary of Data: With Mr. Bisson being someone who is very well connected in downtown Rochester, everything was mostly focused towards the downtown area. Which is perfect because downtown is the majority of Rochester's historic district. We talked a great deal about past, present, and future projects within downtown, as well as citizens' views on historic preservation. There was one project on a historic building that Mr. Bisson helped protect. He said it took an extremely long time to complete this project, but it is the same way for all projects. However, he stated that even with all the work put into this building, no one noticed the differences. He explained that this is due to Rochester having a deep self hate and hatred towards the HDC from previous events years ago. Mr. Bisson said, "You only hear about the HDC when there are problems with it". How do we fix this negative view of the commission and lack of care for history? He recommended, "just make it fun". Some other things he suggested are doing historic walks, giving businesses/homeowners plaques to place outside the buildings with fun historical facts and dates, and placing historical artifacts as outside displays. Basically, if it looks interesting enough people will come. Also need more things focused towards younger

generations so they can also get interested and excited about history. Another big point that Mr. Bisson brought up is that people will come into town and be interested in the area and its history if there is a good downtown. To have a good historic downtown the business owners, HDC, and government need to work together. He states that in order to have business owners in on historic preservation and spread awareness, there needs to be benefit to the business. If it is going to cost them money they will not want it. They want to see money being placed into their business and the city. Having a strong HDC will play heavily into this. If the HDC is frowned upon, why would business want to work with them?

Main Takeaways: From the interview with Mr. Bisson our strongest findings was that historic preservation needs to be fun. It needs to be interesting in order to get all generations involved and excited to learn and spread awareness on historic preservation. It is so important to get younger generations involved and interested because they are going to be the next ones taking over. Also, similar to the findings in the focus group, a strong HDC is needed to get the business owners and other governmental entities involved in preserving history.

Citation: Information sourced from Key Person Interview on March 29rd 2022

Interview Recording: [Historic Preservation Interview with Jeff Bisson](#)

Document Analysis

Description of Method: Research through different articles about previous places/buildings/events that preserved its history effectively. Looking into these articles and seeing the methods they used will help create new ideas that can be used in the City of Rochester to better its historic preservation and preservation awareness.

Summary of Data: One article we looked into is about a place called Little Havana in Miami, Florida. It is “Miami’s Ellis Island” and currently a culture-rich area that is considered home to immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean. Little Havana has been facing threats of development, demolition of historic buildings, zoning, and displacement. These could all destroy this area's deep history but, not doing these things could destroy Little Havana resident’s well being and future. To do this there is a roadmap plan with four main points; identity, mobility, community building, nature, within identity and community building being focused on history. Identity includes constructing infill buildings, rehabilitating/reusing historic buildings, and habitable ancillary dwelling units. Community building includes documenting and designating

historic properties and cultural heritage assets, preserving and developing quality, and celebrating and supporting viable small, local businesses. So far this plan has been very successful and Little Havana is still a key location in Miami. Another article we looked into was about Salem, MA. I think this area has done a great job preserving its history and sharing it. They basically have a whole month where people come from all over the nation to learn about Salem's witch history. I have been lucky enough to go to Salem in October, and it was so much fun and interesting. Every store and building had some history about it, there were numerous different historic walks around the city, historic site seeing, museums, and historic shows. Salem realized they had some special history and instead of doing nothing, they capitalized on it. Today, Salem has numerous preservation projects and successful past projects. One project includes the Judge Corwin House, better known as the Witch House. This house has been up since the 1600s and has been through a lot. Since the City of Salem became the owner of the house it was moved back to widen the road, a new roof was added and has been fully restored, and is now a museum. This location, along with many others, is now a very popular historic tourist destination in Salem, MA.

Main Takeaways: Both of these articles and places are completely different but they can teach us something. Our main findings from these articles is that it is important to make historic preservation fun, once it is fun more people will be interested and aware. Another important takeaway is that, development and historic preservation are able to work together to overall better the entire community.

Citation:

Buildings of New England. (2021, November 2). Salem Ma Historic Preservation. Buildings of New England. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://buildingsofnewengland.com/tag/salem-ma-historic-preservation/>

National Trust for Historic Preservation. (2019). Little Havana: National Trust for Historic Preservation. Little Havana | National Trust for Historic Preservation. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from https://savingplaces.org/places/little-havana#.Yk8KIS2ZM_X

Conclusions

Throughout our research there were a few common trends that we identified between all of the research methods. Those themes are:

- A strong Historic District Commission is needed to advocate for historic preservation and spread historic preservation awareness in Rochester. That is because the citizens “see” the HDC and historic preservation as the same, so if the HDC is seen in a bad light, so will historic preservation.
- Creative ways are needed to spread historic preservation awareness and to get more citizens involved in historic preservation. That is because the old ways of getting people involved are no longer working.
- That historic preservation needs to be a collaborative effort between the government and private industry. That is because there needs to be a common ground between historic preservation and development.

Based on those themes that we have identified we are now going to create a list of recommendations based on said trends.