
*Village of Oak Park
Village-wide Strategic Historic Preservation Plan
Steering Committee Meeting #1
September 8, 2009
7-9PM
Village Hall*

The Village of Oak Park engaged Business Districts, Inc. (BDI) in August 2009 to develop a Village-wide Strategic Historic Preservation Plan. The resulting plan, to be completed in April 2010, will guide the Village's historic preservation work through the next decade.

The project steering committee held its first meeting on Tuesday, September 8, 2009. This meeting began with a presentation describing historic preservation planning in general, the process for Oak Park's plan, and some initial research on preservation programs used in other locales. As noted in the Winter 2009 Forum Journal article on preservation planning, municipality-wide preservation plans are developed in communities, like Oak Park, with existing preservation programming, processes, and advocates. Plans intended as strategic examine the policies, processes, and potential outcomes, given that existing local preservation infrastructure, and how they can evolve to support and sustain the local preservation ethic. As the Village has conducted extensive surveys of its historic resources, this strategic aspect was a key element of this opening presentation. (The article was provided to the steering committee in advance of this first meeting.)

Following the presentation, the steering committee was asked to formulate a mission statement for the current planning process. The mission statement and goals from Oak Park's 1994 Historic Preservation Plan were used as the starting point for mission statement development. The key discussion points from the mission statement discussion are also noted below, as is the project mission statement agreed upon by the steering committee. Finally, steering committee members were asked to identify the current Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, or SWOT, facing historic preservation efforts in Oak Park. This SWOT conversation was intended to identify those broader issues that will need to be considered during the preservation planning process.

This initial steering committee work will be used by BDI as the basis for structuring the first of three Community Workshops. This first Workshop is scheduled for October 21, 2009 (at 7PM). This Workshop will examine attitudes and concerns about Oak Park's current historic preservation planning activities in a group participation format.

Mission Statement Development

The mission statement from Oak Park's 1994 Historic Preservation Plan was used as the basis for this portion of the steering committee session.

1994 Historic Preservation Plan Mission Statement: The mission of the Oak Park Historic Preservation Plan is to facilitate and enhance support for the preservation of Oak Park's historic resources.

Mission Statement Discussion Points

Add Oak Park's cultural personality

Need to be active statement

Who is the intended audience for the mission statement? (To guide the project)

Oak Park has a unique and culturally exciting collection of buildings that this plan needs to enhance.

Global issue concerns of community as historic community

Specify the intent of historic preservation guidance

Address spaces; historic preservation guidelines talk about spaces in the most vague of terms

Density issue for Oak Park, and this has been changing for some time

Consider larger issues for the community

Intellectually creative in addressing preservation

Dealing with areas or neighborhoods

Keep it simple

Oak Park is a progressive place that is also historic

Brutal honesty and extremely direct discussion

'Preservation' can have a negative connotation

Put feeling into words for 'closet' preservationists

Preservation and integration of Oak Park's historic resources into lives of community stakeholders

Define

Oak Park has significant historical and architectural resources and important cultural history

Value heritage and resources

Include the stakeholders--Residents visitors, etc.

The mission is To eliminate/To facilitate...what does that mean?

Outcome: What is it?

Action with inspiration and enthusiasm

Motivation with a plan of action

Taking actions to preserve

To include culture not just age or architectural significance

Foster positive action

Village-wide Strategic Historic Preservation Plan Mission Statement:

To inspire pride and respect for Oak Park's unique heritage and resources by promoting preservation through their continual and creative use.

'SWOT' Summary

For the steering committee discussion, the following definitions were used to identify preservation-related Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, or SWOT. The following SWOT list reflects the thoughts of steering committee participants. There was significant committee discussion surrounding most points.

- Strengths are assets that will most likely continue and remain key elements for future successes in the Village's historic preservation work.
- Weaknesses are characteristics that can limit success and will likely remain, but could be eased by programming or processes.
- Opportunities capitalize on positive trends or local attributes and could become strengths, if properly developed.
- Threats are conditions that currently undermine the success of local preservation planning efforts. If not addressed, these conditions will limit the ability to take advantage of the Village's opportunities.

Strengths

Nationally and internationally known for architectural heritage
Stable and increasing property values
Proximity to Chicago
Existing image that's understood nationally and globally
Engaged citizenry
Established track record of preservation success
Progressive image
Transportation access

Weaknesses

Historic Preservation Commission is too sympathetic
Understanding roles and responsibilities in preservation process
Public process with preservation adds extra dimension to approvals
Property values don't match incentives
Space not suitable for modern retail/restaurant use
Eisenhower splits potential historic resources
Lack of civic leadership and political will

Opportunities

Build visitor market and 'craft the brand'
Educate citizenry and stakeholders
Sustainability
Multi-family architecture
Mid century architecture

Threats

- Chronic underfunding of preservation programming
- Ambivalence about preservation in community and among its leadership
- Using preservation to pursue personal agendas
- Competing agenda with codes and regulations
- Exaggerating scope of problems
- Reputation of Village in real estate arena as difficult to work with