

Chapter 1: Basic Principles of Historic Preservation

Accepted principles of historic preservation provide the basis for the Historic Business District and Local Landmarks Design Guidelines.

Integrity. Buildings with historic integrity have a sufficient percentage of structure exhibiting characteristics from the period of significance. The majority of the building's structural system, materials and key architectural features should date from that time, allowing it to be recognized as a product of its era.

Contributing Property. Properties with sufficient historic integrity are deemed to be "contributing" to the Historic Business District and are the focus of several chapters of these design guidelines. The Town of Pagosa Springs historic preservation regulations define the criteria for being a contributing property within a district. See Appendix C for a list of contributing and non-contributing properties within the Historic Business District. This list should be updated as needed by the Historic Preservation Board.

Non-contributing Property. The Town of Pagosa Springs historic preservation regulations state non-contributing elements do not meet the criteria for recognition of a property as contributing, but "do not noticeably detract from the historic district's sense of time, place and historical development." Although these properties do not contribute to the historic significance of the district, demolition, expansion and exterior renovation will affect the overall character of the district. Non-contributing elements will be evaluated for the magnitude of impact by considering their size, scale, design, location and/or information potential. Therefore, a number of chapters in these design guidelines apply to projects undertaken on non-contributing properties.

Alterations. Many historic structures have experienced alterations as tastes changed or the need for additional space occurred. Early alterations typically were subordinate in scale and character to the main building and were often executed using materials similar to those used historically.

Some alterations may have historic value of their own. An alteration constructed in a manner compatible with the original building and associated with the period of significance may merit preservation in its own right.

In contrast, some alterations may have no historic value. Some additions detract from the character of the building and may obscure significant features. Removing such additions or alterations is desirable.

It is inevitable that alterations to structures will continue. It is important that new alterations are designed in a manner compatible with the historic character of the structure and implemented without damaging the historic structure's fabric.



Contributing and non-contributing properties exist side-by-side in the Historic Business District. (Pagosa Springs, CO)



Rehabilitation returns a property to a state that preserves features that are significant to its history while making a contemporary use possible. (Phillips' residence, 138 Pagosa Street)

Rehabilitation. The rehabilitation of existing historic features is an important goal of most historic preservation activities. State of Colorado Certified Local Governments (CLGs) are required to follow the United States Secretary of the Interior standards for historic rehabilitation, as follows:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Basic Preservation Methods

Choosing an Approach. Preservation projects may include a range of activities, such as maintenance of existing historic elements, repairs of deteriorated materials, the replacement of missing features or construction of new additions. The following is a list of approaches that are appropriate for contributing properties:

Preservation. “Preservation” is the act or process of applying measures to sustain the existing form, integrity and material of a building. Some work focuses on keeping a property in good working condition by repairing features as soon as deterioration becomes apparent, using procedures that retain the original character and finish of the features.

Rehabilitation. “Rehabilitation” is the process of returning a property to a state that makes a contemporary use possible while still preserving those portions or features of the property which are significant to its historical, architectural and cultural values. Rehabilitation may include a change in use of the building or building additions.

Restoration. “Restoration” reproduces the appearance of a building exactly as it looked at a particular moment in time. This process may include the removal of later work or the replacement of missing historic features.

Reconstruction. “Reconstruction” of a building means rebuilding a structure as it appeared historically, although it no longer exists.

When planning a preservation project, it is important to identify any historically significant features and materials. Once identified, the following sequence should be used to determine the appropriate treatment:

In essence, the preservation method that requires the least intervention is preferred. By following this tenet, the highest degree of integrity will be maintained for the property.

First: Preserve. If a feature is intact and in good condition, maintain it as such.

Second: Repair. If the feature is deteriorated or damaged, repair it to its original condition.

Third: Replace. If it is not feasible to repair the feature, replace it with one that is the same or similar in character (e.g., materials, detail, finish) to the original one. Replace only that portion which is beyond repair.

Fourth: Reconstruct. If the feature is missing entirely, reconstruct it from appropriate evidence.

And Lastly: Distinguish New Features and Additions. If a new feature or addition is necessary, design it in such a way as to minimize the impact on original features. It is also important to distinguish new features from original historic elements, as defined in Chapters 5 and 7.

Benefits of Historic Preservation

Construction Quality

Many historic buildings exhibit a high construction quality and include finishes and details that are difficult to reproduce today.

Livability and Quality of Life

When groups of buildings complement each other in their historic context, they create a street scene that is “pedestrian friendly,” encouraging walking and neighborly interaction. Decorative architectural features and distinct architectural styles also contribute to a sense of identity which is difficult to achieve in newer areas of the town.

Economic Benefits

Older areas are finite and cannot be replaced, making them precious commodities. Therefore, preservation adds value to property. Many studies across the nation document that, where local “historic districts” are established, property values typically rise, or at least are stabilized. Property owners within such an area know that the time and money they spend on improving their properties will be matched with similar efforts on surrounding lots; these investments will not be undermined by inappropriate construction next door. The condition of neighboring properties also affects the value of one’s own property.

Because historic rehabilitation projects tend to utilize local labor and materials, historic buildings generally contribute more directly to the local economy than new building programs. Studies have shown that each dollar spent on a rehabilitation project continues to circulate in the local economy five to seven times, which helps support other businesses, as opposed to new construction which circulates three times.

Ownership of a historic property carries a responsibility to respect the historic character of the property and its setting, but does not automatically translate into higher construction or maintenance costs. Ultimately, residents and property owners should recognize that historic preservation is a long-range community objective that promotes economic well-being and overall viability of the community at large.

Special incentives are available at the state and federal level to help offset potential added costs of appropriate rehabilitation efforts. Eligible projects may also qualify for the Colorado Historical Fund grant monies. Federal and state tax credits also provide a substantial opportunity for owners of significant commercial and residential properties. Contact the Town of Pagosa Springs Planning Department for information on incentives available to owners of historic properties.