

## A History of Aspen's Historic Preservation Program

(A work in progress)

- 1972** Encouraged by a citizen's group called "Save the Victorians," City Council adopts a historic preservation ordinance establishing a process for the designation and review of historic structures, and the creation of the Historic Preservation Committee. Aspen is one of the first communities in the state, and among the earliest cities in the nation, to adopt historic preservation regulations.
- 1973** The first designations take place in 1973 and 1974. They were: Wheeler Opera House, Ute Cemetery, Wheeler-Stallard House, Pitkin County Courthouse, Lift 1, City Hall, and the Community Church. These public or non-profit properties have high significance to the community. The criteria for landmark designation is a finding that the property has historic importance, architectural importance, or geographic importance to the City. Owner consent is sought, but not needed for designation. Additional designation findings must be made that the designation is appropriate with relation to the Aspen Area General Plan, effects on the neighborhood and other relevant planning considerations. HPC has review over demolition and relocation of these landmarked properties, and review over alterations in terms of assuring appropriate features are preserved. It appears that there are no design guidelines, and none existed for another 10 years.
- 1974** Commercial Core Historic District created. HPC's review is expanded to include new construction in the historic district in terms of assuring that new work is "complimentary" to adjacent historic resources.
- 1976** Main Street Historic District created. HPC's purview is expanded to include this area.
- 1980** The City completes its first comprehensive "Inventory of Historic Sites and Structures." 306 properties are identified, 287 of which are still standing after the research and documentation is completed. The Land Use Code in effect at the time discusses the process for designation of districts and landmark properties. If the HPC identifies a property as qualifying for designation, and the owner agrees to designation, the matter proceeds directly to Council for approval. If the owner does not agree, the HPC's recommendation is forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Commission, and then on to Council. Council can approve nonconsensual designation. HPC continues to have purview only over designated landmarks or properties in the historic districts. Most of the historic resources are essentially unprotected since at this point only about 24 properties, or less than 10% of the sites identified by the inventory have been landmarked. Properties included on the Inventory were rated using a 1-18 point scoring system in order to evaluate their significance. Points were allocated based on the building's association with important persons or notable architectural styles. The

point value was then used to categorize the properties as “notable,” “excellent,” or “exceptional.” Through the process of surveying and studying each property, some were discounted and considered to have minimal historic value due to poor integrity. It was noted that these properties could eventually qualify for one of the categories stated above if appropriate documentation and restoration of the structure could be developed.

The 1980 Inventory study suggested the creation of other historic districts, including the Community Church Historic District, Hallam Lake Historic District, West Bleeker/Hallam Street Historic District and Lift 1 Historic District. The districts were not adopted.

- 1986** The City adopts the “Aspen Area Comprehensive Plan: Historic Preservation Element.” The Plan addresses the creation of more incentives and special development options for historic properties. The “Issues and Concerns” section of the Plan states that, “The HPC needs to look at some of the outstanding modern residences by Bayer, Benedict, and other recent architects for designation to ensure preservation.”

During the drafting of the Comprehensive Plan, a 6 month moratorium is enacted on demolition of any structure included in the 1980 Inventory, presumably due to the continued loss of historic structures. The idea of adopting a townsite wide “river to river, mountain to mountain” historic district is included in the ordinance. The townsite wide district never comes about.

During the moratorium, the city expands the HPC review from just landmarks to include the highest rated structures on the inventory.

An update of the inventory is completed.

The first HPC design guidelines are completed.

The Land Use Code is amended to state that everything built before 1910, and all other buildings identified by HPC as outstanding examples of more modern architecture should be on the inventory.

HPC continues to only have full purview over the historic districts and landmarks which is a limited percentage of the inventory.

The first incentives for historic properties were developed.

- 1987** The City hired its first professional Historic Preservation Officer. Aspen becomes a “Certified Local Government,” agreeing to operate its historic preservation program according to certain standards established by the National Parks Service and Colorado Historical Society.

- 1988** HPC begins presenting annual awards for excellent projects.

- 1989** Demolition review is expanded to cover the entire inventory. The numerical scoring system that rated the significance of the property is dropped, although the terms “significant, contributing, and supporting” are retained. More incentives are added.

- 1991** The historic inventory is updated. 28 properties are recommended to be added, some of which are Post World War II buildings. Most of these properties are added to the inventory through ordinances adopted over the following four years.
- 1993** The Aspen Area Community Plan is adopted. The Historic Preservation Element goals included expanding the HPC's purview to cover all alterations to properties on the inventory.
- 1995** Amendments to the historic preservation ordinance are approved, including changing the criteria for listing on the inventory from properties built before 1910 or otherwise identified as outstanding examples of more modern architecture to properties which are at least 50 years old or otherwise identified as outstanding examples of more modern architecture.
- 1998** The City holds a "Historic Preservation Symposium," attended by City Council, the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Historic Preservation Commission, the Community Development Department, historic preservation experts from Crested Butte, Telluride, Nantucket, the Colorado Historical Society, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Aspen Historical Society, former members of the Aspen HPC, and citizens at large following the demolition of the Paepcke House. Numerous goals were established at the symposium, including the direction to designate more recent structures.  
Code amendments are adopted giving HPC full review over alterations to any property listed on the inventory, as described in 1993 AACP.
- 1999** Committees form to work on an update of the AACP. The HPC's philosophy statement, as adopted into the plan, states that "Aspen's distinctive history is irreplaceable whether it be the late nineteenth-century miners' cottages, the Bauhaus buildings introduced by architect Herbert Bayer, or the faux-chalets built by ski instructors in the 1950's and 60's." The action plan for the AACP includes the direction to "Protect all buildings and sites of historic significance," and to update the inventory.  
The City and County adopt the first mandatory historic preservation contractor licensing program in the country.
- 2000** Fieldwork for an update to the historic inventory is completed. Approximately 50 properties, primarily built after World War II are recommended for adoption. Ordinances are brought forward, causing controversy. Action is stopped on adding Post-War properties to the inventory.  
Numerous community meetings, tours, lectures and meetings are initiated over the next two years in order to revise problematic aspects of the historic preservation ordinance and bring about a common understanding of the importance of recognizing Aspen's post-war history.  
Updated historic preservation design guidelines are adopted.

- 2001** A Historic Preservation Community Forum is held as part of the ordinance re-write.
- 2002** Council adopts a new historic preservation ordinance and increases historic preservation benefits.  
The City receives an award from “Colorado Preservation, Inc.” for its state of the art ordinance.  
HPC and Council hold a worksession to finalize the integrity scoring system and post-WW2 research papers, integral elements of the newly adopted designation process.
- 2005** HPC and Council hold a worksession to discuss an update on the progress of designating post-war resources through owner cooperation.  
As of this time the City has approximately 300 designated historic resources and review within two historic districts.