



National Trust for Historic Preservation

How Historic Preservation Can Help the Environment

We can't build our way out of our environmental problems, but we can – and must – make better, wiser use of what we've already built. That's what sustainability is all about.

Our Position

Historic preservation can – and should – be an important component of any effort to promote sustainable development. The conservation and improvement of our existing built resources, including re-use of historic and older buildings, greening the existing building stock, and reinvestment in older and historic communities, is crucial to combating climate change.

We're challenged to find a way of living that will ensure the longevity and health of our environmental, economic, and social resources. Addressing that challenge is the goal of the National Trust's Sustainability Initiative, which aims to help people better understand preservation's value in fostering development that is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

Environmental Sustainability

Historic preservation is an effective tool for valuing and protecting our environmental resources, including those that have already been expended as well as those not yet used. Because it encourages us to reuse sound older buildings instead of abandoning or demolishing them, and to revitalize existing neighborhoods instead of building sprawling new subdivisions, preservation is "recycling" on a grand scale.

Economic Sustainability

An economic system is not sustainable unless it respects the limits of the ecosystems on which it depends. By advocating wise stewardship of existing resources and judicious development and use of new ones, historic preservation advances this goal. In addition, preservation supports economic sustainability by encouraging reinvestment in existing communities and local economic bases.

Social Sustainability

Historic preservation protects and celebrates the social and cultural resources that define and unite us as Americans, and ensures that they will survive to enrich our communities and our lives for generations to come.

The environmental, economic and social benefits of preservation can be further enhanced by improving the energy efficiency of historic buildings. More and more projects are demonstrating that older buildings can “go green” – and our Sustainability Initiative, especially through this website, will serve as a “best practices” resource for employing green technology in the reuse and rehabilitation of historic structures.

Our Position on Rehabilitation Tax Credits

The National Trust for Historic Preservation supports the creation and maintenance of Federal and State rehabilitation tax credits for restoring older and historic structures, particularly as they relate to preserving community character, affordable housing, and central business districts and Main Street economic development activity. The National Trust also supports expansion of these credits as they relate to alleviating urban flight, property abandonment, and economically distressed neighborhoods and as a tool for sustainable development.

Our Position on Modernism and the Recent Past

The National Trust for Historic Preservation recognizes the importance and significance of cultural resources of the post-war and modern era, and aims to enhance the public’s appreciation for and understanding of mid-20th Century architecture. The National Trust hopes to unite emerging popular interest in preserving the recent past with proper preservation practices through the promotion of continued use and sensitive rehabilitation of these structures.

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