

# Historic Preservation Analysis



## **Green Bay Smart Growth 2022**

# Historic Preservation Analysis

**Introduction ..... 13-1**

**Preservation Efforts and Existing Conditions ..... 13-1**

    Historic Preservation Surveys and Planning Documents. 13-1

    The Historic Preservation Commission and Ordinance (HPC) ..... 13-2

    Locally Designated and National Register Properties ..... 13-4

**Summary of Major Issues ..... 13-6**

    Protection and Enhancement of Historic Resources..... 13-6

## List of Figures

Figure 13-1: Historic Districts and Sites ..... 13-3

## List of Tables

Table 13-1: Architectural and Historical Themes in Green Bay ..... 13-2

# Historic Preservation Analysis

## Introduction

As one of the oldest settlements in Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest, Green Bay has a long and rich history (see the brief account under “Historical Influences” in the Land Use Analysis section). Most of the buildings, sites and structures that still remain within the City, however, date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This analysis describes the existing context of preservation in Green Bay and identifies the major issues the City faces in managing and preserving its historic resources.

Preservation of Green Bay’s architectural heritage began in the 1970s when several properties, including the Brown County Courthouse and the buildings in Heritage Hill State Park were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Brown County Historical Society took the lead in these preservation efforts.

The National Register, maintained by the National Park Service, Department of Interior, is the official national list of historic properties considered worthy of preservation. Once listed, properties are eligible for federal tax incentives for qualified rehabilitation. Any federal or federally-funded project that would demolish or substantially alter a National Register property is subject to review by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

## Preservation Efforts and Existing Conditions

### Historic Preservation Surveys and Planning Documents

A 1975 windshield survey conducted by the Historic Preservation Division of the State Historical Society identified approximately 150 sites of historic or architectural interest. These sites were re-surveyed in 1987-1988 as part of the *Intensive Resources Survey*, described below. The Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI) lists 3,777 records for properties in Green Bay, based on the 1975 and 1987-88 inventories.

The 1988 *Green Bay Intensive Resource Survey*, prepared by the consulting firm HNTB for the Green Bay Redevelopment Authority, consisted of a comprehensive historical/architectural resource survey of both the east and west sides of the City and fifteen thematic historical chapters that outline various aspects of the City’s history as it applies to the surveyed resources. The purpose of the thematic research is to develop an overview of the history of the community in order to identify resources considered important to past events. These themes, listed in Table 13-1, are similar to historic contexts in that they provide a framework for evaluating the significance of properties within temporal limits. Each theme has a detailed list of potentially eligible and listed properties and should be used to identify significant properties in Green Bay.

## 13. Historic Preservation

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**Table 13-1: Architectural and Historical Themes in Green Bay**

1. Agriculture
2. Art
3. Commerce
4. Education
5. Fur Trade
6. Government
7. Historic Native Americans
8. Industry
9. Planning and Landscape Architecture
10. Recreation and Entertainment
11. Religion
12. Settlement/Ethnic Groups
13. Social and Political Movements
14. Transportation
15. Architecture

The survey report recommended a number of buildings and districts for nomination to the National Register. One of these, the Oakland-Dousman Historic District (see below) was nominated and listed in the course of the survey process. Boundaries for the other recommended districts could not be finalized, however, and nominations were not prepared. As a result of the survey of the east side, the Brown County Historical Society recommended that a Downtown Historic District be nominated to the National Register. That recommendation was reviewed and rejected by the Redevelopment Authority. Instead, six individual properties were nominated to the National Register in October 1988.

### **The Historic Preservation Commission and Ordinance (HPC)**

The Historic Preservation Commission was established in 1995 in response to Wisconsin legislation making its establishment

mandatory for cities of a certain size. The City Council selected the most “advisory” of the available models because they noted that cities with more stringent regulations appeared to be getting “bogged down” in legal issues. They preferred that the Green Bay Commission play a more advisory and persuasive role.

The Historic Preservation ordinance (Section 13.62 of the Zoning Code) establishes the HPC as an advisory body and states its basic function: “the development of public support and the location and identification of historic sites, historic structures, and historic districts.” The ordinance authorizes the HPC to:






- designate historic structures, sites and districts, and nominate these, where appropriate, to the National Register of Historic Places
- adopt specific operating guidelines for designation of historic structures, sites and districts;
- conduct additional surveys of properties that might be eligible for historic designation; develop criteria and standards for evaluating properties
- promote public education, interest and support for preservation activities;
- advise the Common Council and other agencies;
- enlist assistance from the National Trust, the State Historical Society, the County Historical Society, and other organizations
- work with owners of historic buildings and sites on a voluntary basis

The Historic Preservation Commission has adopted the mission of “building pride in ownership of historic properties” through development of a registry (plaques on designated properties) and other educational efforts. However, the fact that other preservation organizations (notably the Brown County Historical Society) are already heavily involved in similar research and educational efforts has left the HPC at somewhat of a loss as to what meaningful activities it should undertake.

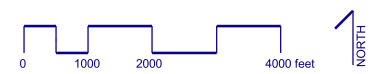


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-  Astor
-  Broadway-Walnut
-  Broadway-Dousman
-  Oakland-Dousman
-  Historic Buildings

**Figure 13-1**  
**Historic Sites and Districts**



### Locally Designated and National Register Properties

The following districts and buildings have been locally designated by the City and are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Figure 13-1 indicates the location of these resources.

#### Historic Districts

**Astor District (1980):** The first National Register district in the City, Astor was one of the original town plats of Green Bay. It was platted by Wisconsin's first judge, James Duane Doty, in 1835, on land owned by John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. (The Village of Navarino, the oldest part of the city, was platted in 1829). Astor became known as "the hill," and was settled by many of the city's most prominent citizens. According to the National Register nomination (1978), "the Astor Historic District is significant as the highest concentration of residences of the economic and civic leaders of Green Bay from its period of settlement well into the twentieth century." Architectural styles span the period from 1835 through 1920, and include the highest concentration of Victorian residential structures in the City. It also includes several large churches, organized around several one block square parks that were part of the original plat: Astor Place, Jackson Square, St. James' Park and St. Johns Park.

**Oakland-Dousman District (1988):** This west side district consists of twenty homes, located primarily along the west side of Oakland Avenue between Shawano on the south and Dousman Avenue on the north. According to the *Intensive Resource Survey*, "The Oakland-Dousman Historic District was nominated to the National Register on the basis of local significance in architecture and for its association with the lives of locally significant individuals... Architecturally, the District represents the best and most intact group of high style residential architecture west of the

Fox River, in what was previously the independent community of Fort Howard."

Many of the homes in the District belonged to leaders of local commercial and financial institutions, including the Fisk, Blesch and Larsen families. Many of these buildings were constructed adjacent to homes built by previous generations. Architectural styles represented in the district include the Italianate (represented by the separately-listed Joel S. Fisk house), Queen Anne, Prairie School, and Neo-Classical Revival.

**Broadway Historic Districts (1999):** A Broadway historic district was proposed in the *Intensive Resource Survey* but was not nominated at that time. As originally proposed, it included about five blocks of Broadway and cross-streets, and included both commercial and industrial buildings. As stated in the *Intensive Resource Survey*,

"It contains the surviving commercial core of what was once the center of Fort Howard, annexed to the City of Green Bay in 1895. As long as Fort Howard remained a separate community, Broadway was its "Main Street." Following the merging of the cities in 1895, Broadway ceased to be a city center and gradually took on the role of neighborhood commercial center. New buildings slowly replaced most of the original wood frame buildings that were the first structures on the street, but they generally retained the same proportions and often served the same function until the growth of the suburban areas of Green Bay following World War II caused a general decline in activity."

Two separate districts were ultimately nominated and listed on the National Register in 1999: the Broadway-Dousman District and the Broadway-Walnut District, almost contiguous areas separated by Hubbard Street and several non-historic buildings. A particularly noteworthy building in the Broadway-Walnut District

is the Jones Motor Company garage at 143 N. Broadway, a rare example of the Egyptian Revival style applied to a small commercial building.

### Individually Designated Properties

A number of Green Bay's historic structures are no longer located within the City, but were moved in the 1970s to Heritage Hill State Park, on South Webster Avenue in Allouez. Heritage Hill is a living history museum that interprets and recreates four different time periods: early fur trade history (1672), the Fort Howard army post (1836), Green Bay as a small town (1871), and a Belgian Farm typical of many found in Northeast Wisconsin (1905). National Register-listed buildings from Green Bay that were moved to the park include:

- **The Baird Law Office:** This a one-story Greek Revival structure, the oldest law office west of the Great Lakes, was built in 1835 as a land office originally located on Main Street near Monroe Avenue. It was moved several times before its relocation to Heritage Hill.
- **The Cotton House:** Also known as Beaupre Place, this large Greek Revival style house was built in the mid-1800s on the east bank of the Fox River as the retirement home of Captain John Winslow Cotton; it was moved to the Heritage Hill site in 1938 and was restored as a museum.
- **Fort Howard Hospital, Officers' Quarters and Ward Building (Kitchen):** The Fort Howard complex originally stood on the site now occupied by the Green Bay and Western rail yards on Clinton Street on Green Bay's west side. The three buildings at the park, all of wood frame construction, were built between 1832 and 1835 as part of the fort's reconstruction. The fort was abandoned by 1852 and the buildings were sold and moved to serve as private homes or were torn down.
- **Tank Cottage:** Believed to be the oldest standing home in Wisconsin, the Roi-Porlier-Tank Cottage originally was built in the late 1700s on the west bank of the Fox River near the end of Eighth Street. The central portion was French piece-sur-piece construction (four foot planks stacked on top of each other in between uprights). After being moved to Union Park, which was then renamed Tank Park, the house was moved to Heritage Hill in 1975.

Individually listed properties located within the City include:

- **The Brown County Courthouse, 100 S. Jefferson Street:** Built 1908-1910, the courthouse is the only surviving example of the classically-inspired Beaux Arts style in the City. It is also noteworthy for its interior murals by German-born artist Franz Rohrbeck depicting historic themes.
- **Kellogg Public Library and Neville Public Museum, 125 S. Jefferson Street:** The public library building, built in 1901-03, is an excellent example of the Neoclassical Revival style. The library was built to replace a smaller facility with financial assistance from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The Neville Museum, founded in 1915, occupied space in the library building until an adjacent building was constructed in the 1920s. The building is now used as office space. Both the library (now the Brown County Library) and the museum now occupy contemporary buildings.
- **The Chicago and Northwestern Railway Passenger Depot, 202 Dousman Street:** A massive brick building built in 1898 in an eclectic variation of the Italian Renaissance Revival style. The station (now in use as a brewpub-restaurant) is notable for its five-story square brick tower and for the retention of its original passenger veranda, which spans the entire east side of the building.

### 13. Historic Preservation

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- **The Joel S. Fisk House, 123 N. Oakland Avenue:** Located in the Oakland-Dousman Historic District, this large two-story brick building is a fine example of high-style Italianate design; formerly in use as a public library, now a law office.
- **The Fox Theater, 117 S. Washington Street:** Originally known as the Bay Theatre, the theatre was built in 1928 by the Warner Brothers studios in California as an outlet for their motion pictures as well as live vaudeville shows. The building features Art Moderne elements, and included an auditorium with 2,200 seats; its restoration was planned in 2001.
- **Hazelwood, 1008 S. Monroe Avenue:** A Greek Revival style mansion built in 1837-38 by Morgan L. Martin, a Brown County Judge, President of the Bank of Wisconsin, and an author of the Wisconsin State constitution. The Neville Public Museum Corporation bought the building in 1964 and restored it as a public museum, now managed by the Brown County Historical Society.
- **The Milwaukee Road Passenger Depot, 400 S. Washington Street:** Built in 1898, the depot is an excellent example of the Flemish Renaissance Revival style of architecture. It is currently used as offices by the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

## Summary of Major Issues

### Protection and Enhancement of Historic Resources

The *Intensive Resource Survey* included many recommendations for establishment of additional historic districts, designation of individual properties, and studies of other potential districts. Many of these are associated with Green Bay's rich heritage of religious architecture. The following potential districts were recommended for study:

- Green Bay and Western Railroad Yards Historic District (since demolished)
- West Side Vernacular Historic District
- Downtown Historic District
- St. John the Evangelist Church Historic District
- St. Francis Xavier Cathedral Historic District
- Christ Episcopal Church Historic District
- Holy Cross Church Historic District
- Astor Park Historic District (east of the Astor Historic District)

However, since the survey was completed, few designations or studies have been undertaken, with the exception of several individual downtown buildings and the Broadway districts. Meanwhile, additional buildings and structures, such as the Green Bay and Western Railroad Yards, have been extensively altered or demolished. The following issues should be considered in this context:

- Are the City's historic resources adequately protected from threats such as demolition, inappropriate remodeling, loss of economic viability, etc.?



- Do historic properties need additional levels of protection? (For example, review of site or development plans that might affect their integrity.)
- Would design review guidelines provide a basis for evaluating alterations to historic properties and new construction in historic districts? (This approach has been suggested for the Broadway districts.) If so, should guidelines be voluntary, linked to City grants or loans, or mandatory? Would the HPC, Planning Commission or planning staff, neighborhood organizations, or other commissions be the most appropriate reviewers of proposals for compliance with guidelines?
- Do historic (but not designated) buildings in downtown Green Bay need some level of recognition, designation and/or protection?
- Should historic resources in other parts of the City, as recommended in the *Intensive Survey Report*, be studied for eligibility for designation (either as individual resources or districts)?
- Should historic preservation considerations be integrated into other City programs and policies (housing, zoning, etc.)? How might this be accomplished?

## **The Role of the Historic Preservation Commission**

### **HPC Responsibilities**

The HPC views its primary goal as to **build pride in ownership of historic properties**. Recent and current activities include:

- Publication of a brochure on Green Bay Packers historical sites, in partnership with a Packer Trolley Tour. (The Brown County

Historical Society is viewed as having the greatest expertise in producing brochures and publications, however.)

- Preparation of a City registry of historic buildings, using a plaque which homeowners would be able to request. There would be three options for inclusion in registry: nomination by others, application by the property owner, or award by HPC.

### **Designation Priorities**

The HPC's statutory responsibility, which sets them apart from local private preservation organizations, is the function of designating historic buildings under the local ordinance. However, the HPC does not have a prioritized list of buildings or neighborhoods for designation studies. They are often in a position of being unaware of the demolition of historic resources (such as the recently demolished Green Bay and Western Railroad yard buildings and structures). Furthermore, they have no long-term strategy for extending designation to any properties, classes of properties or potential districts within the City.

- How can the HPC begin to work with the Common Council, neighborhood groups and others to develop a better understanding of the benefits of heritage preservation?
- What, if anything, could the HPC do to strengthen their educational role? Options might include walking or driving tour brochures, workshops for homeowners and/or contractors, an awards program for exemplary re-use projects, etc.

**HPC Staffing:** Currently staff assistance to the HPC is provided by the City Attorney's office. The City Attorney's secretary provides assistance in preparation of minutes and meeting notices, and the Superintendent of Inspections advises them as to pending demolition permits. The HPC has no designated planning staff to assist them.

### 13. Historic Preservation

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**Planning Participation:** The HPC has not been involved in City regulatory activities, except for informal review of pending demolition permits. The HPC does not review housing or neighborhood plans or programs, or provide input on planning or redevelopment activities in historic areas.

- Is there support for moving the HPC administrative responsibilities to the Planning Department, while maintaining the legal advice and assistance of the City Attorney's Office?
- Are there opportunities to identify staff who can work with the HPC and better integrate them into other planning activities? (For example, should a planner be assigned as a liaison to the HPC, or should support services be provided?)
- What other responsibilities might be appropriate for the HPC? For example, some Commissions routinely review site or building plans for any improvements to designated buildings. If design guidelines were put in place, should the HPC review plans for compliance?

**Preservation Planning and Certification:** Many cities have developed preservation plans to guide the work of their Historic Preservation Commissions. A preservation plan identifies the statutory responsibilities of the HPC, establishes goals for individual and district designations, educates the public about the heritage preservation process, and formalizes the HPC role in city government activities. A preservation plan could provide an efficient way to consolidate information about historic preservation and provide guidance in various planning activities.

Local governments in Wisconsin can be designated as "Certified Local Government" by the Wisconsin Historical Society if they incorporate stricter review procedures into their preservation ordinances. The HPC would be given additional authority to approve or disapprove changes to historic properties, consistent with

adopted guidelines or criteria. Certified local government status brings eligibility for grants and other financial incentives for owners of historic properties.

- Should the HPC pursue additional training opportunities? These might include attending state conferences, reviewing other cities' programs, requesting specialized training from the State Historical Society, etc.
- Is there support for development of a preservation plan to educate and establish roles, responsibilities and priorities for the Historic Preservation Commission?
- Should the HPC and City evaluate the costs and benefits of Certified Local Government designation? Can standards be developed that balance private property rights with community values?