

## SECTION I

### WHY PRESERVATION MATTERS

#### History, economics and quality of life

As much as the Sound and the mountains, the eclectic downtown buildings of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries play an essential, ongoing role in shaping Olympia’s character and civic identity. Some of the most appealing features of downtown Olympia—pedestrian-scale streetscapes, storefronts with recessed doorways, a central town square with a bandstand—are legacies from the past.

Historic places connect us to earlier generations and help us to picture a world that existed long before our own time. At Capitol Way and Tenth Avenue, a single surviving streetcar pole tells of an age when electric trolleys ran along what was then Main Street. At the lunch counter of a landmark café from 1939, clips on the backs of swiveling chairs speak of an era when men wore hats—and stowed them while seated indoors.

But preserving our historic resources is not just about “saving” history. It’s about the economy, too. Historic preservation should be viewed as a smart investment that pays off in jobs, higher property values, best use of public infrastructure and revitalized neighborhoods.

#### Preservation supports local jobs

Compared to new construction, a typical rehabilitation project spends 10 to 20 percent more of total costs on labor. Carpenters, electricians, plumbers and painters for such projects are almost always hired locally—and spend their wages here, too. Historic preservation generates jobs in other fields as well. Architects, lawyers, accountants, interior designers, wholesale suppliers and real estate brokers all stand to benefit from local preservation.

#### Preservation increases property values

Properties in established historic districts increase in value more rapidly than similar properties in unrecognized and unprotected older neighborhoods. According to several studies including one conducted in Knoxville, Tennessee, which compared the sales prices of homes over a four-year period, property values increased 157% in a neighborhood with both National Register Historic District status and local preservation zoning. Prices in a neighborhood with National Register status alone (no local regulations) rose 36%; prices in a similar neighborhood with no designation at all rose 20% in the same period. The Knoxville area as a whole showed only a 16% increase in sales prices over the same four years.

# Background

## **Historic Preservation Promotes Downtown Revitalization**

Historic preservation is an effective community economic development strategy. Since 1980, some 1700 communities have pursued downtown revitalization using the preservation-based principles of the national Main Street Program, which has resulted in 231,682 new jobs, 57,470 new businesses, and \$17 billion in investment nationwide. While most preservation projects may be relatively modest in scale, their cumulative effect often equals or exceeds that of larger projects.

## **Preservation encourages tourism**

Cultural tourism, including history- and preservation-related travel, is a growth industry around the globe. “Among cities with no particular recreational appeal,” writes travel authority Arthur Frommer, “those that have substantially preserved their past continue to enjoy tourism. Those that haven’t receive no tourism at all.”

## **Older structures were built to last**

The life expectancy of many buildings constructed before 1945 may be greater than that of those built in recent decades. It is a sound investment to restore and rehabilitate substantial, well-constructed historic structures rather than to replace them.

## **Historic Preservation Supports Taxpayers’ Investments**

Every community has already made a huge investment in sidewalks, lights, sewers, roads, streets and other infrastructure. When taxpayers have already paid for public infrastructure, it makes sense to protect that investment. A commitment to historic neighborhoods and downtown revitalization is one of the most fiscally responsible policies that local government can adopt.

When it comes to community planning, we cannot afford to regard historic preservation as an expendable “extra.” It should be seen instead as a crucial tool for creating the sort of city in which we all want to live.