PRESERVATION TOOL KIT

Brief A-2 May, 2001

WHAT IS HISTORIC PRESERVATION?

Historic preservation is the planned and guided protection, management, documentation, rehabilitation, restoration and maintenance of our historic and cultural resources.

As recently as 1960, private efforts at preservation were limited to the rescue of an important mansion or monument; the federal government was busily engaged in urban renewal programs which leveled older parts of many communities; few states had preservation programs; and local governments which made preservation an official part of their planning process were few and far between.

Enormous changes in attitudes towards historic preservation have come in more recent years as a result of a growing concern for our dwindling resources, the loss of community character, the escalating costs of new construction, a new appreciation for the economic value of historic buildings and places, and the stimulus of federal preservation with the passage of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act.

Since then historic preservation in the United States has grown from essentially a museum movement to a broad environmental concept involving housing rehabilitation in older neighborhoods, land use planning, creative adaptive uses for older buildings, the revitalization of downtowns, and protection of landscapes and agricultural areas. Private investment in preservation is extensive, ranging from individuals of ordinary means working to restore their homes to large development firms and corporations rehabilitating industrial and commercial properties. Nonprofit preservation organizations at the local, county and state levels have assumed important leadership roles as historic preservation advocates. Agencies charged with administering the recording and protection of historic resources have been established by every state and territorial government. Thousands of municipalities across the country have enacted ordinances for the preservation of historic landmarks and districts.

Historic preservation is no longer concerned with saving a few pristine monuments – it is recognized as a vital tool for the protection and enhancement of city and countryside. It does not mean saving everything, nor does it mean stopping growth. The issues associated with preservation may best be viewed as the management of change rather than the halting of change. In the broadest sense, historic preservation is an attitude we bring to the overall planning of our communities and environment.