



Agenda
City Commission Special Meeting Workshop
Monday, December 1, 2025 - 6:30 PM
151 Martin Street, Birmingham, Michigan
City Commission Room 205

This will be considered a workshop session of the City Commission. No formal actions will be taken. The purpose of this workshop is to discuss the Historic Preservation Master Plan.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Clinton Baller, Mayor

2. ROLL CALL

Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk

3. PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

A. Historic Preservation Master Plan Introduction - Nick Dupuis, Planning Director

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

5. ADJOURN

City boards and committees meet in person, and most have a virtual option available to the public. Members of the public may attend the City Commission meeting in person at Birmingham City Hall or attend virtually.

Link to Access Virtual Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/655079760>

Telephone Meeting Access: 877 853 5247 US Toll-free

Meeting ID Code: **655 079 760**

City Hall is open to the public during regular business hours, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. The Police Department lobby entrance on the east side of City Hall on Pierce Street operates as the after-hours public entrance.

Individuals requiring assistance to enter the building should request aid via the intercom system at the parking lot entrance gate on Henrietta Street.

Persons who require mobility, visual, hearing, or other assistance for effective participation in this public meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at (248) 530-1880, or (248) 644-3405 (TDD) at least one day before the meeting to request help.

Las personas con incapacidad que requieren algún tipo de ayuda para la participación en esta sesión pública

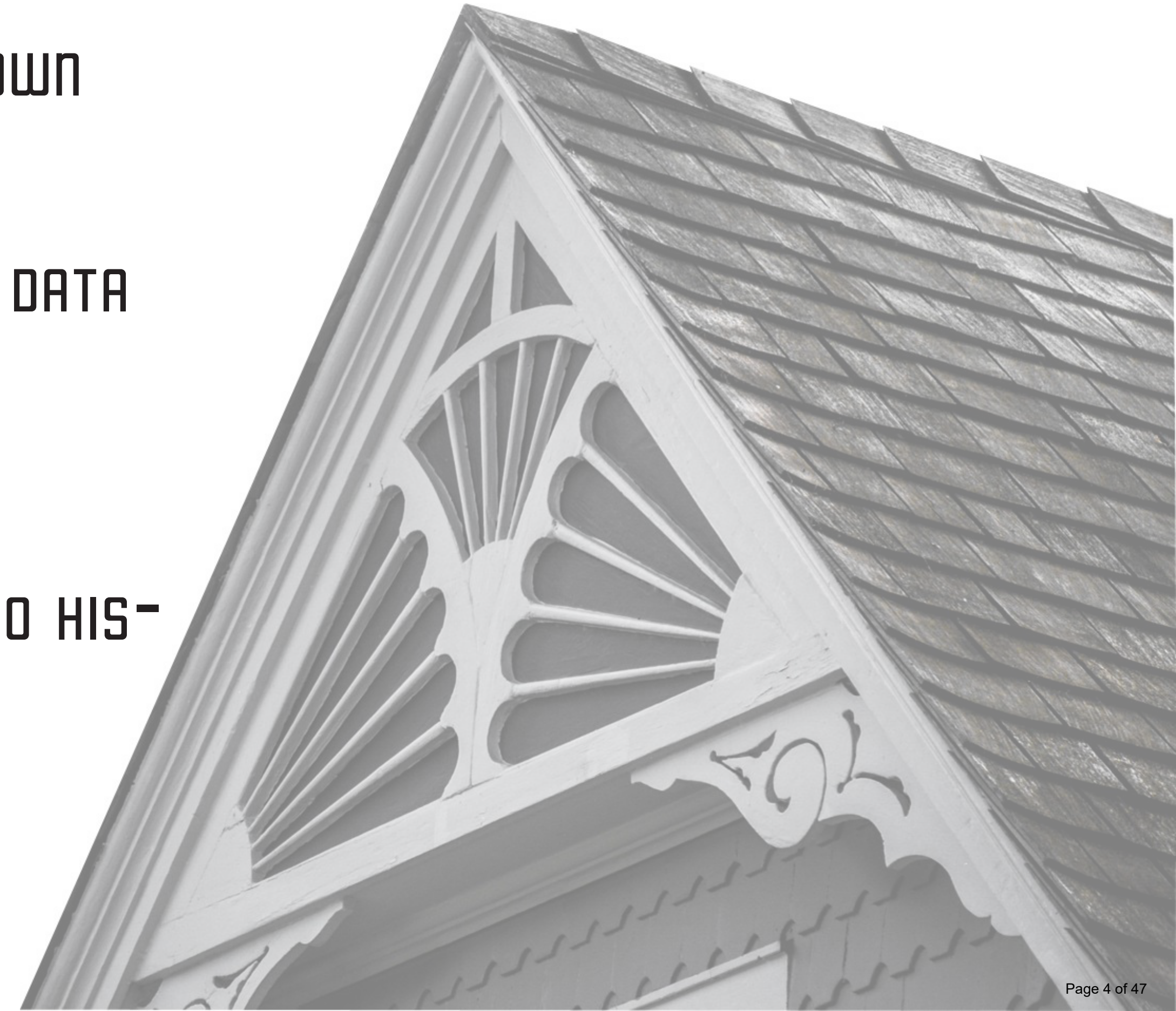
deben ponerse en contacto con la oficina del escribano de la ciudad en el número (248) 530-1800 o al (248) 644-3405 (para las personas con incapacidad auditiva) por lo menos un día antes de la reunión para solicitar ayuda a la movilidad, visual, auditiva, o de otras asistencias. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964)

HISTORIC PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN



PRESERVATION MASTER PLANNING

- PRESERVATION PLANNING IS THE RATIONAL, SYSTEMATIC PROCESS BY WHICH A COMMUNITY DEVELOPS A VISION, GOALS, AND PRIORITIES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF ITS HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES.
- THE COMMUNITY SEEKS TO ACHIEVE ITS VISION THROUGH ITS OWN ACTIONS AND THROUGH INFLUENCING THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS.
- GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON ANALYSES OF RESOURCE DATA AND COMMUNITY VALUES.
- SHIFT FROM REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE PRESERVATION.
- BALANCING REGULATORY AND NON-REGULATORY APPROACHES TO HISTORIC PRESERVATION.



PLAN STRUCTURE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. INTRODUCTION

3. DATA & MAPPING

4. HISTORIC DESIGNATION

5. ACTION PLAN

6. CONCLUSION

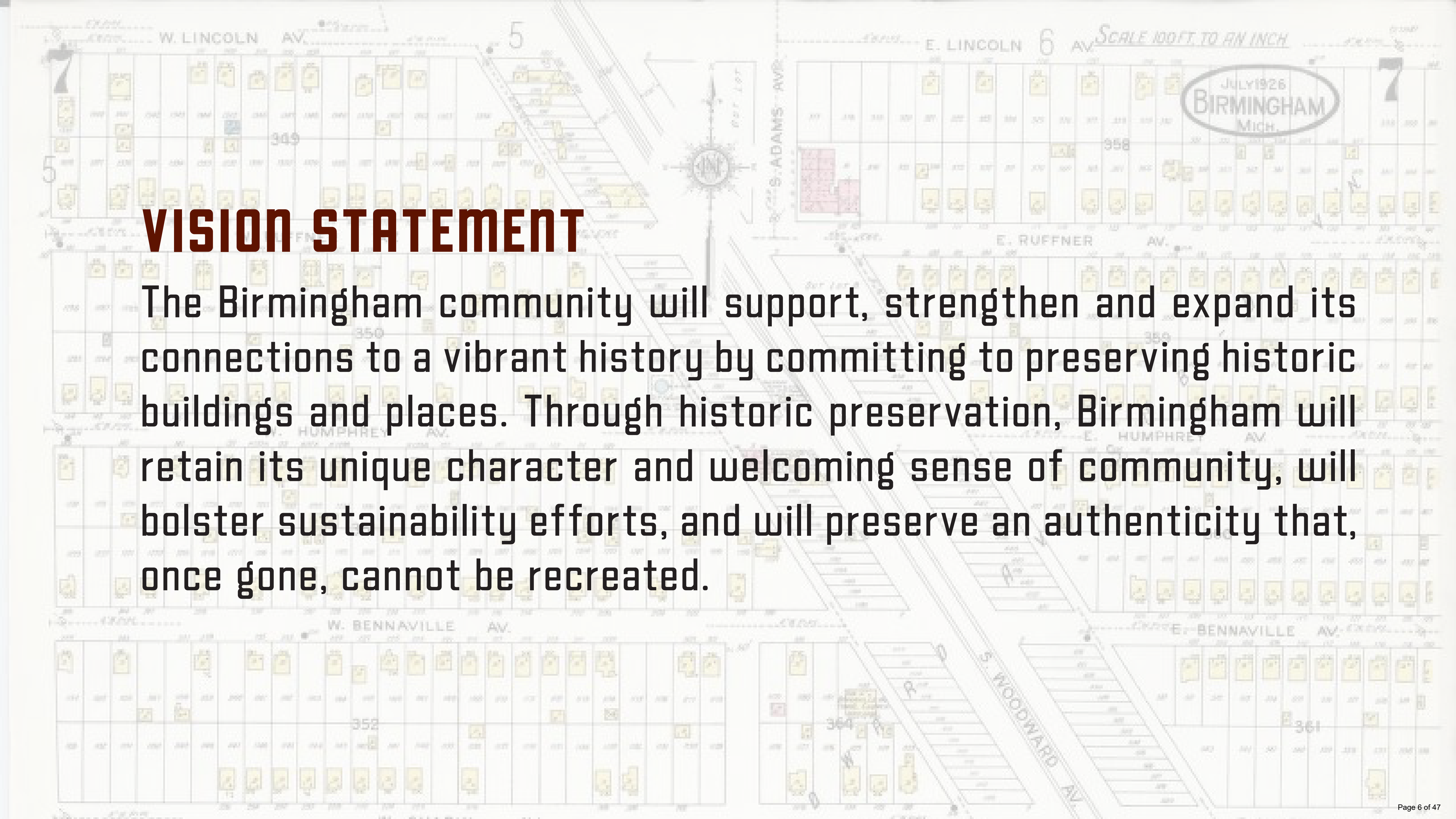
7. GLOSSARY

8. APPENDIX

● Major “Table Setting”

● Strategies for Achieving
Vision & Goals



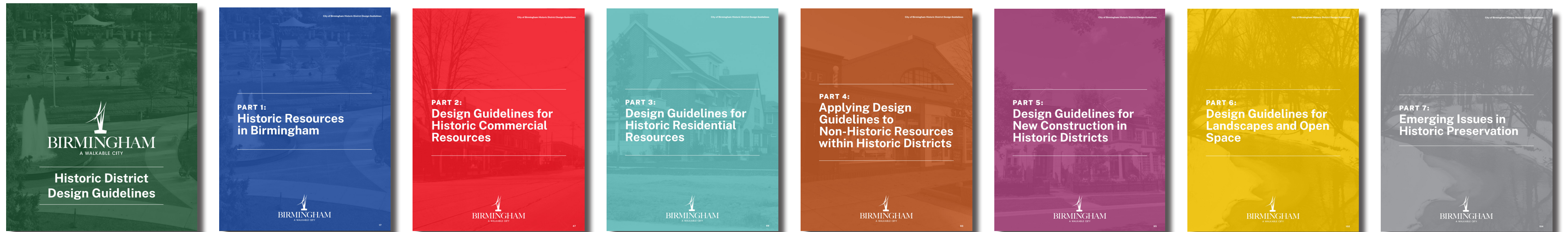


VISION STATEMENT

The Birmingham community will support, strengthen and expand its connections to a vibrant history by committing to preserving historic buildings and places. Through historic preservation, Birmingham will retain its unique character and welcoming sense of community, will bolster sustainability efforts, and will preserve an authenticity that, once gone, cannot be recreated.

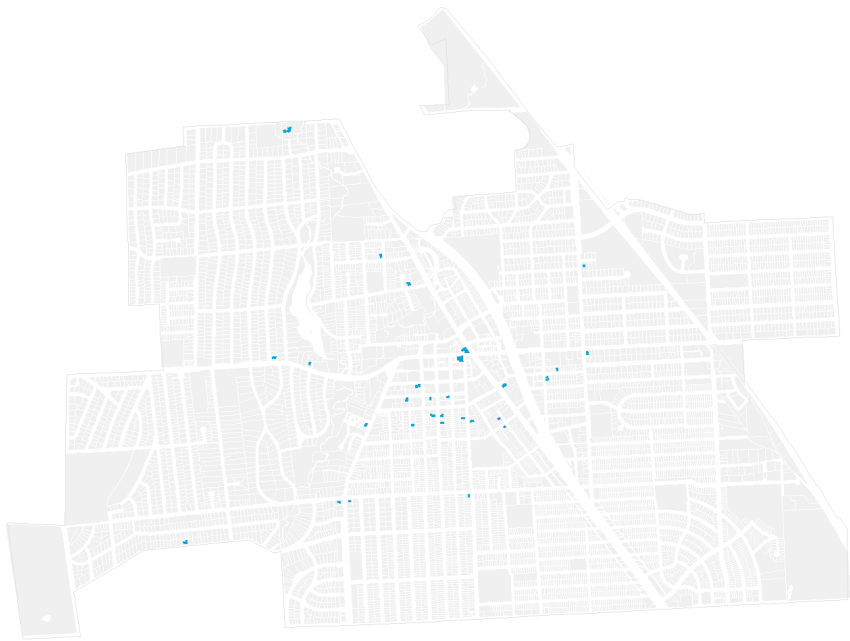
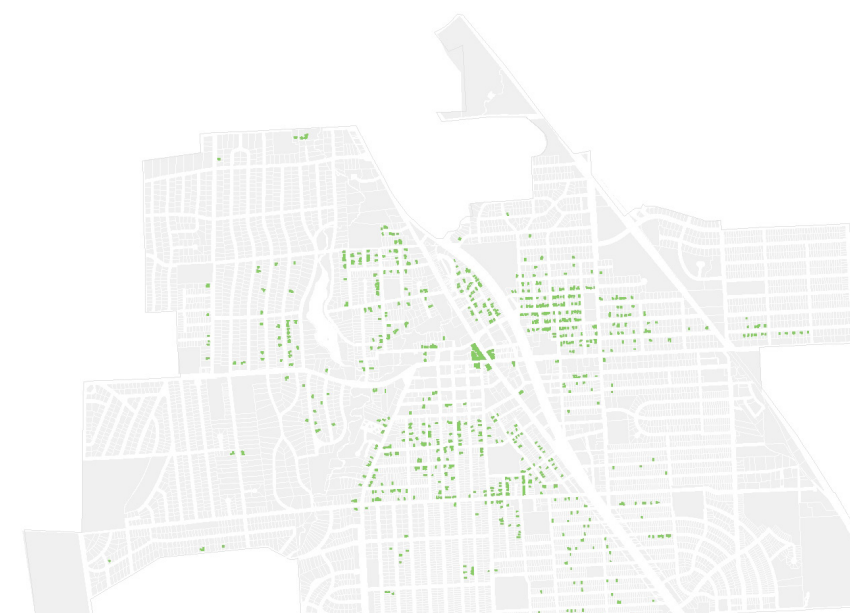
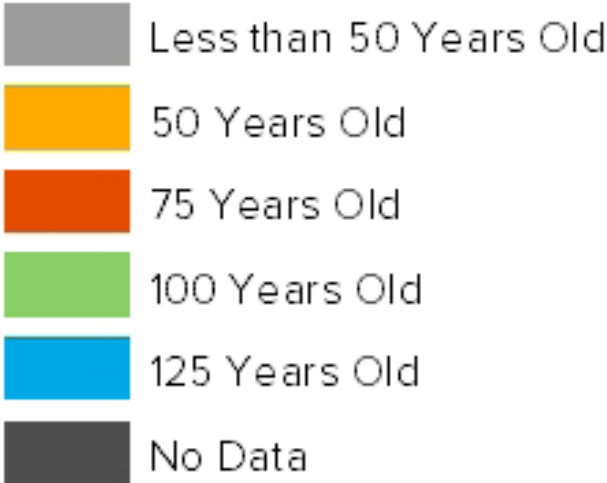
HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

- FORMALLY ADOPTED IN 2023
- PROVIDES TECHNICAL AND CONTEXTUAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO APPROACH KEY ISSUES DURING DESIGN REVIEW PROCESSES THAT ARE BOTH COMMON IN BIRMINGHAM AS WELL AS COMMON IN MOST COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY.
- A TOOL FOR MANY - RESIDENTS, DEVELOPERS, PROPERTY OWNERS, ARCHITECTS, CONTRACTORS, OR SIMILAR STAKEHOLDERS
- THE BIRMINGHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES AND THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN SHOULD BE CONSIDERED SISTER DOCUMENTS.



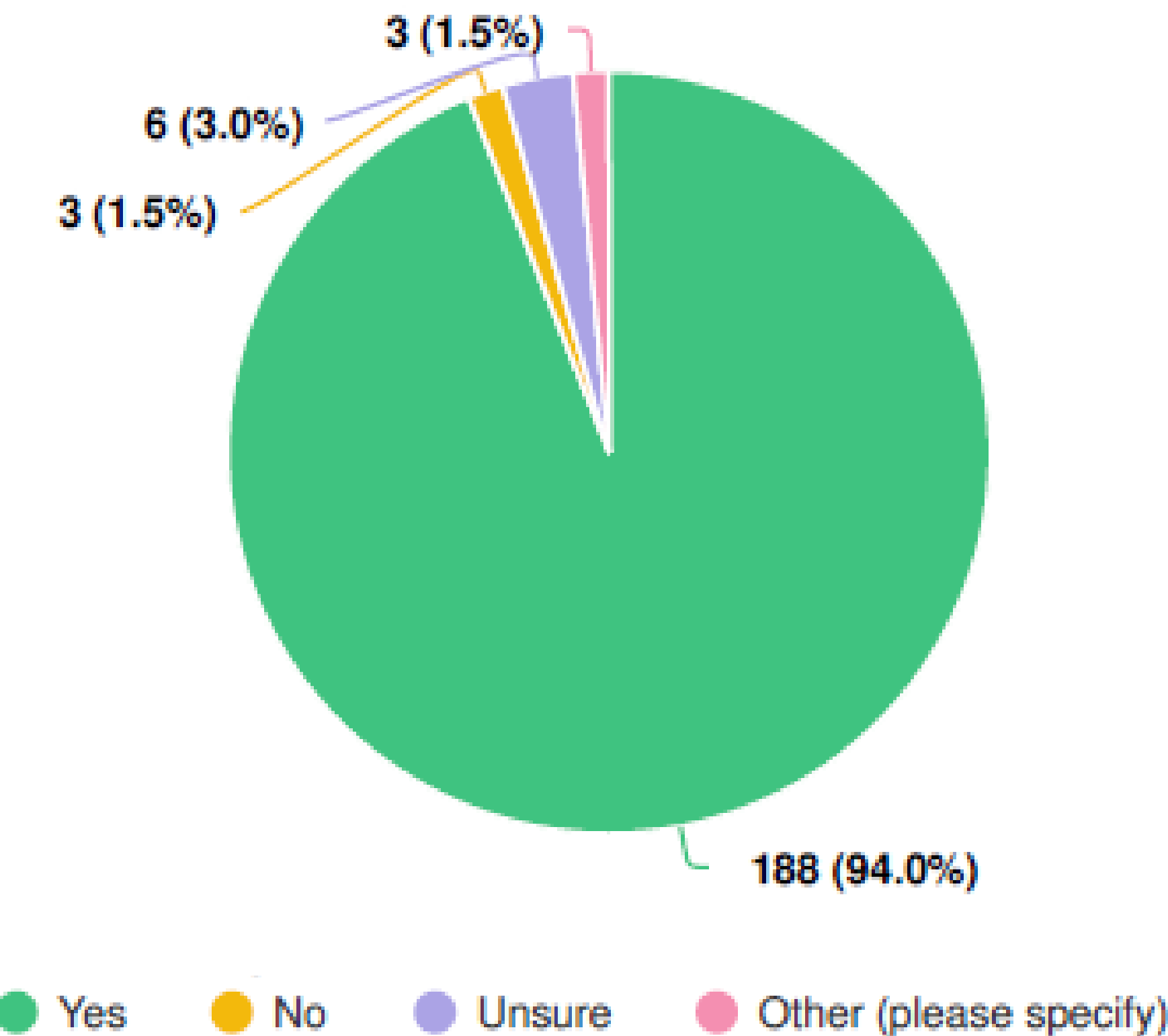
DATA & MAPPING

Birmingham Building Age

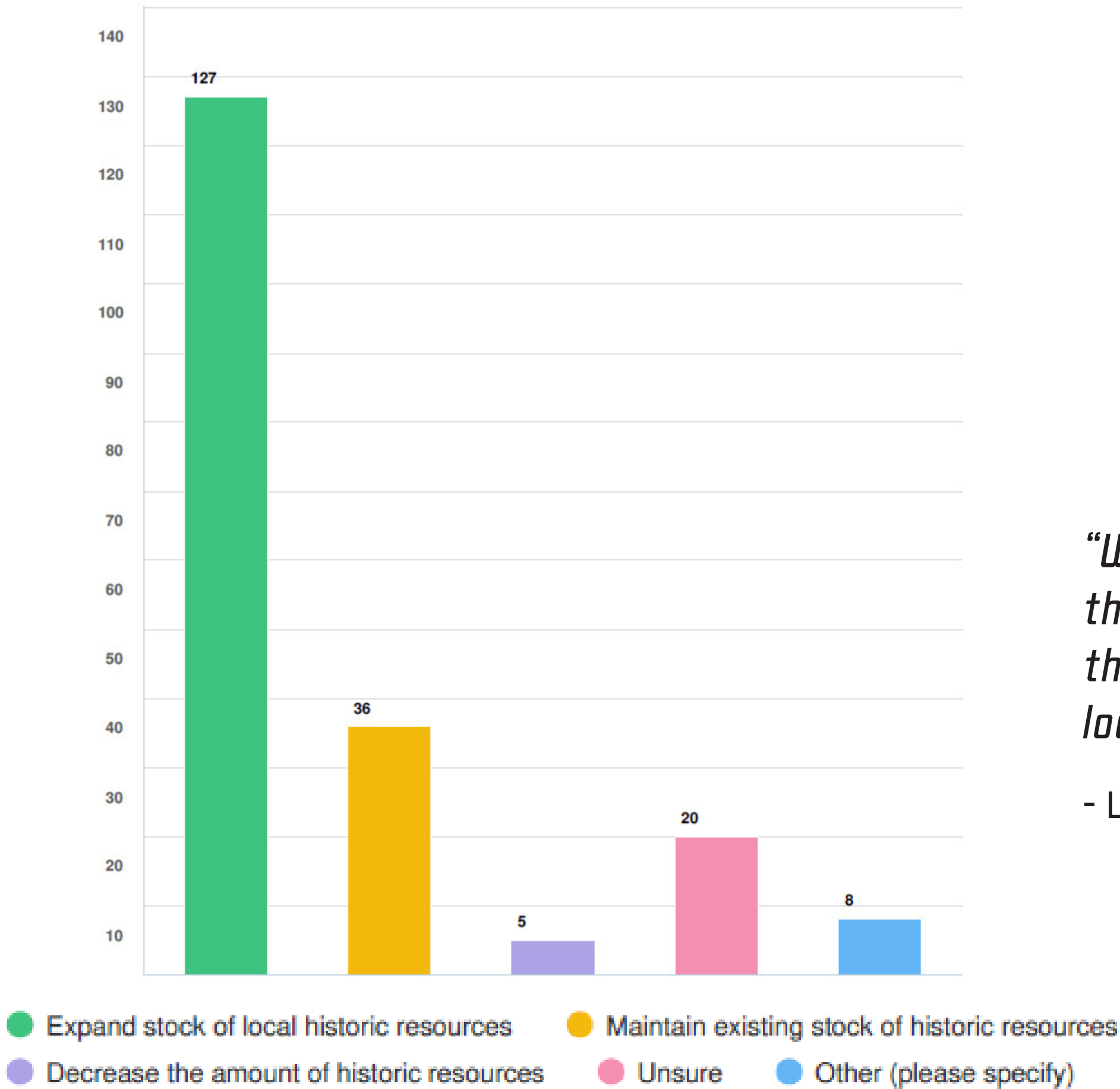


PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

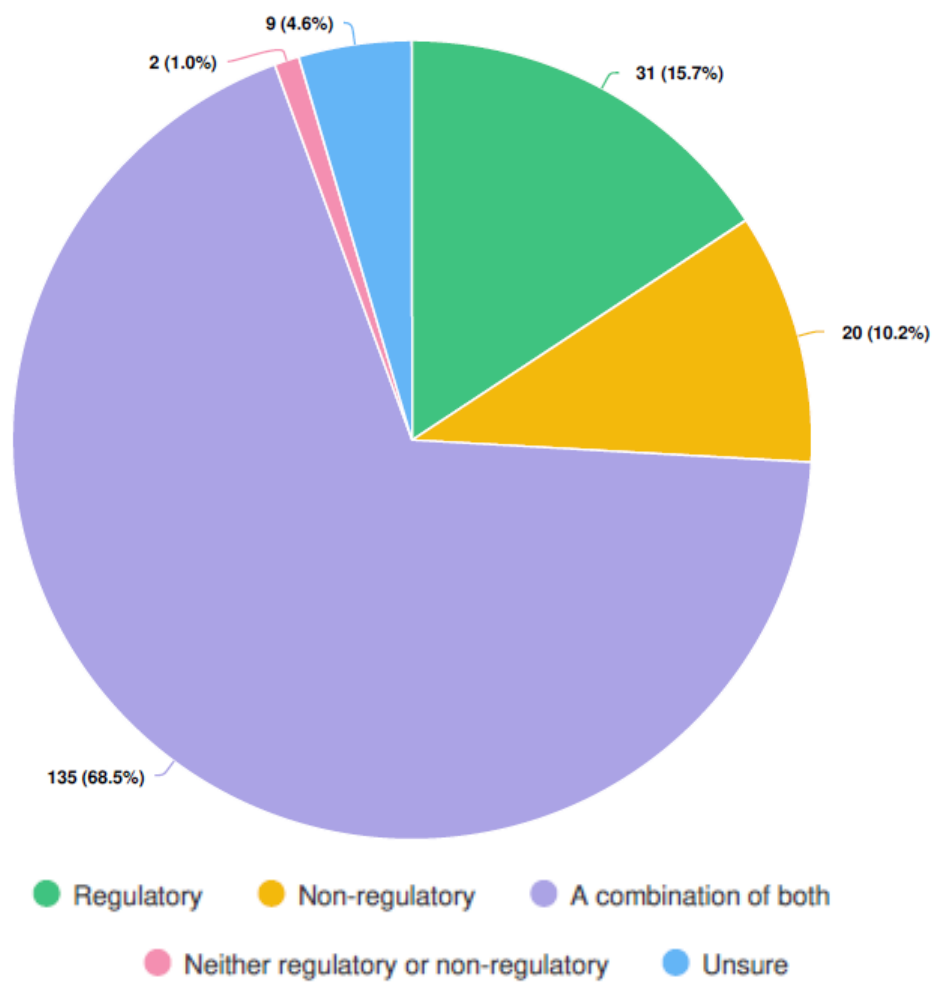
Do you believe historic preservation is a worthwhile goal?



What direction do you think the City should take in the future regarding the creation of local historic resources [buildings and/or sites]?



The approach to historic preservation can be simplified in to regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. Which approach do you feel better suits the City of Birmingham?



“We don’t want to sound negative about the homes lost, but we do believe that there can be a cultural shift in how we look at Birmingham’s oldest homes.”

- L.S. - Birmingham Resident

HISTORIC DESIGNATION

SECTION CLARIFYING WHAT DIFFERENT DESIGNATIONS MEAN AND WHAT IT DOES TO A PROPERTY:

- LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION - PROTECTIVE
- BIRMINGHAM HERITAGE HOME PROGRAM - RECOGNITION
- NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES - RECOGNITION
- NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM - PROTECTIVE
- MICHIGAN HISTORICAL MARKER PROGRAM - RECOGNITION



ACTION PLAN

- REFLECTS BEST PRACTICES, REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS, LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, AND RESIDENT/STAKEHOLDER INPUT.
- RANGE IN TERMS OF LEVEL OF EFFORT, REGULATORY VERSUS NON-REGULATORY, AND TIME HORIZON.
- A “BLUEPRINT” FOR IMPLEMENTATION.

**CLEAR
GOALS**

**TASKS &
STEPS**

**RESPONSI-
BILITY**

**REQUIRED
RESOURCES**

Get Back to the Basics [B2B]

To support existing historic resources and create an environment that is conducive to historic preservation.

Highlights:

- B2B-2 - Perform biennial reviews of all historic district boundaries and resources.*
- B2B-8 - Increase and regularize enforcement of maintenance requirements to ensure that historic materials are not lost to neglect.*

Embrace Proactivity [PRO]

To transition the City from a reactive approach to historic preservation to a proactive one and meet people where they are.

Highlights:

- PRO-2 - Petition for historic designation of all remaining Wallace Frost designed homes in the City.
- PRO-8 - Adopt a demolition delay ordinance.
- PRO-13 - Historically designate 40 additional buildings or properties by 2040 ["40 by 40"].

Inform and Engage [INF]

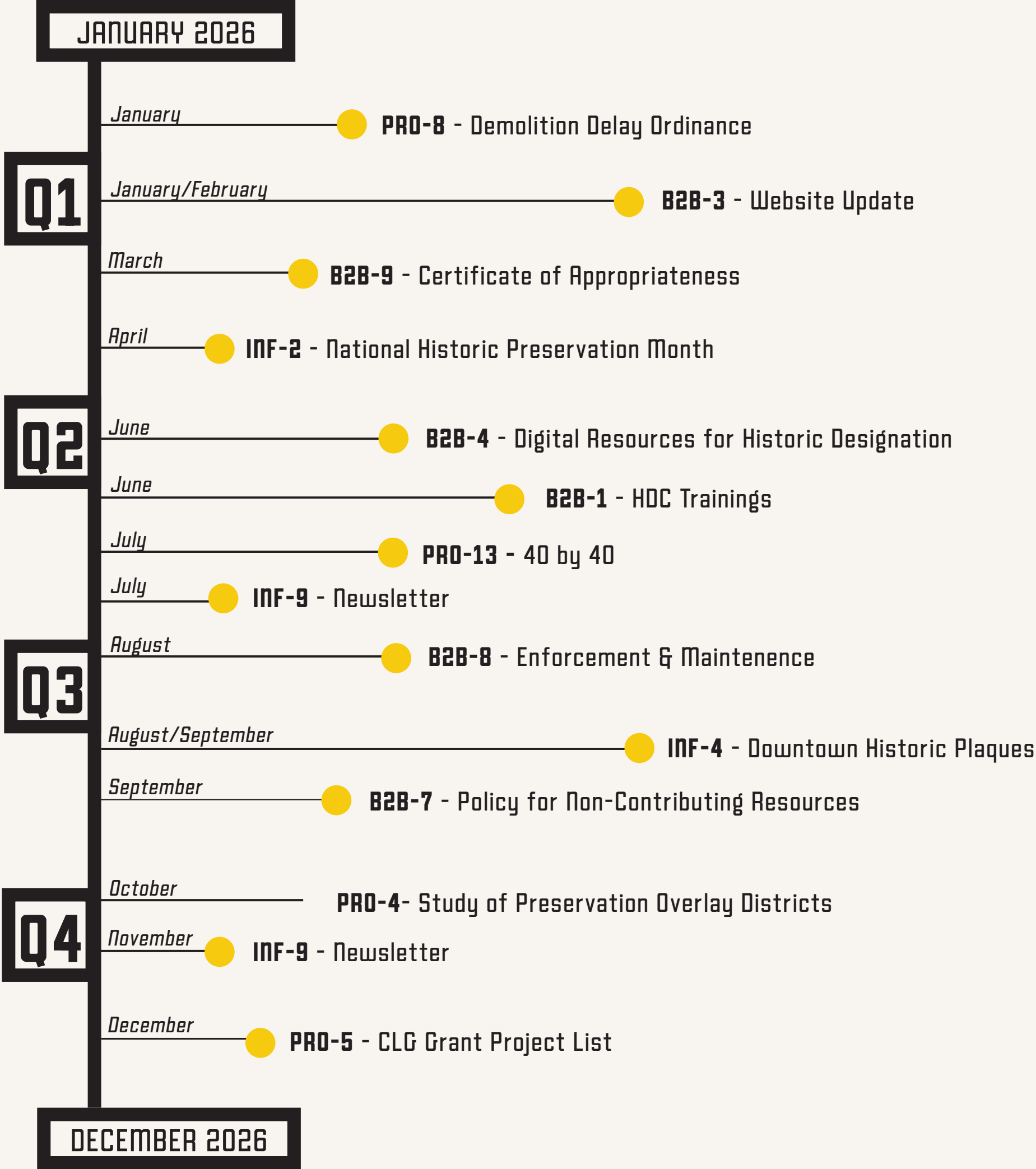
To boost the profile of historic preservation in Birmingham to a level that unifies public opinion towards historic preservation in the City.

Highlights:

- INF-2 - Provide unique programming during National Historic Preservation Month every year.*
- INF-5 - Create more opportunities for the City to interact with property owners of historic resources.*

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

- CURRENT “FINAL DRAFT” AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC COMMENT.
- BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM & HDSC REVIEW
- TARGET ADOPTION DATE: JANUARY 12, 2026
- SEND COMMENTS TO NDUPUIS@BHAMGOV.ORG



PLAN DOCUMENT (PUBLIC COMMENT DRAFT)

HISTORIC PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN



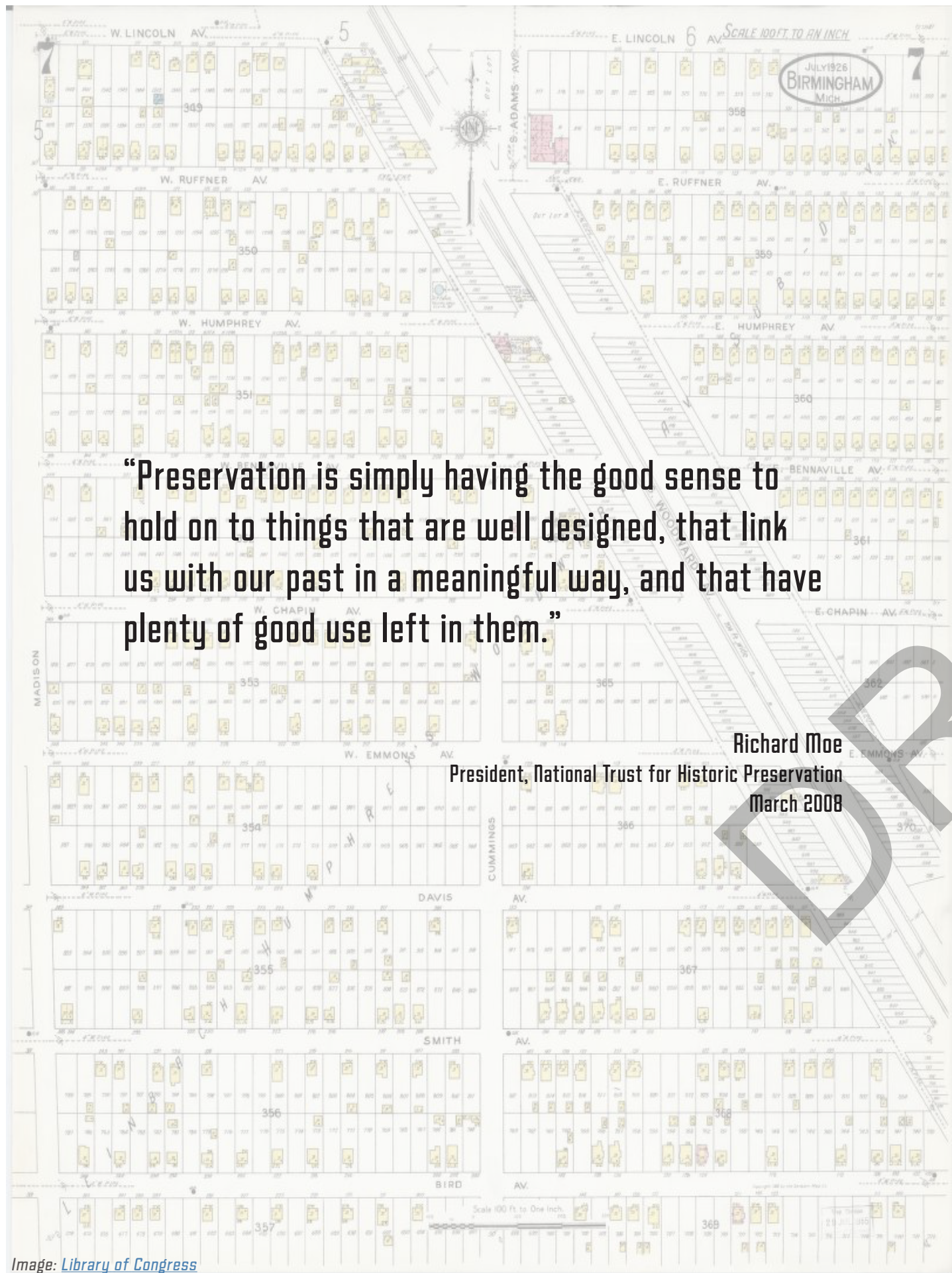


Image: Library of Congress

BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham City Commission

Clinton Baller, Mayor
Anthony Long, Mayor Pro Tem
Therese Longe
Andrew Haig
Brad Host
Kevin Kozlowski
Bill Kolb

Birmingham Historic District Commission

Dustin Kolo, Chairperson
Keith Deyer, Vice-Chairperson
Gigi Debbrecht
Natalia Dukas
Timothy Collins
Michael Willoughby
Patricia Lang
Steven Lemberg
Mary E. Jaye

Birmingham Historic District Study Committee

Jake German, Chairperson
Margie Duncan
Sean Moran
Ron Berndt
Jennifer Roush
Katherine Barta

Birmingham City Staff

Nicholas Dupuis, AICP, Planning Director [Author]
Summer Aldred-Arens, City Planner
Edward Ricketts, Planning Assistant
Jana Ecker, City Manager

Resources & Support by:



[DRAFT NOVEMBER 2025]

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DRAFT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VISION STATEMENT

The Birmingham community will support, strengthen and expand its connections to a vibrant history by committing to preserving historic buildings and places. Through historic preservation, Birmingham will retain its unique character and welcoming sense of community, will bolster sustainability efforts, and will preserve an authenticity that, once gone, cannot be recreated.



GOALS - HISTORIC PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN

1

Goal #1: Get Back to the Basics

To support existing historic resources and create an environment that is conducive to historic preservation.

The Historic Preservation Master Plan recognizes the valuable stock of historic resources that are currently designated within the City. As time marches forward, these resources will need to be maintained and treated consistently against the City's Historic Design Guidelines. In addition, opportunities for monetary support should be prioritized.

2

Goal #2: Embrace Proactivity

To transition the City from a reactive approach to historic preservation to a proactive one and meet people where they are.

The City has access to a multitude of resources from data to social networks to several useful tools that can be leveraged to ensure that irreplaceable resources are not lost to neglect, and that new pockets of history in Birmingham can continually be discovered. At times, the community may not know what it has until it is brought to them.

3

Goal #3: Inform and Engage

To boost the profile of historic preservation in Birmingham to a level that unifies public opinion towards historic preservation in the City.

To build continued support for historic preservation in Birmingham, the City must provide the community with the information it needs to understand what it means to preserve and why it is important. Emphasis can be added to robust data and accessibility of information.

Summary of Actions

Understanding the Summary of Actions

The following tables consolidate all of the objectives contained within this Plan and provide for a one-stop-shop to review what this Plan is recommending, but also estimates as to when the City may expect to start each of the projects based on the interconnectedness of the goals, relationships to other plans, or political environments. This summary is aspirational and the goals and associated objectives and timelines are expected to eb and flow over the implemen-
tation of this Plan.

Table Key:

BROAD OVERALL GOAL			
Shorthand Abbreviation of Goal for Ease of Association	Objective	Regulatory or Non-Regulatory	Post-Adoption Implementa- tion Timeline Intention

GOAL #1 - GET BACK TO THE BASICS

B2B-1	Provide annual training for Historic District Commission and Historic District Study Committee members.	NR	YR. 1+
B2B-2	Perform biennial reviews of all historic district boundaries and resources.	NR	YR. 2
B2B-3	Update the city's historic preservation webpage with current information and resources.	NR	YR. 1
B2B-4	Create simple, high quality resources for commonly requested information including (but not limited to) the process for historic designation, what it means to be a designated historic resource, and the "do's and don'ts" of preservation.	NR	YR. 1
B2B-5	Pursue a nomination of City Hall and the Baldwin Public Library to the National Register of Historic Places.	NR	YR. 3
B2B-6	Review and update historic preservation ordinances to meet current needs.	R	YR. 4
B2B-7	Develop policy and procedures for the review of work performed on noncontributing resources/properties within historic districts.	R	YR. 1
B2B-8	Increase and regularize enforcement of maintenance requirements to ensure that historic materials are not lost to neglect.	R	YR. 1
B2B-9	Develop a consistent Certificate of Appropriateness to issue to property owners after project approval.	R	YR. 1

GOAL #2 - EMBRACE PROACTIVITY

PRO-1	Engage with realtors, brokers, and other persons engaged in the sale of land and buildings towards the preservation of historic buildings.	NR	YR. 3
PRO-2	Petition for historic designation of all remaining Wallace Frost designed homes in the City.	R	YR. 4
PRO-3	Perform a full reconnaissance level survey of the Little San Francisco neighborhood.	NR	YR. 3
PRO-4	Study the feasibility of preservation overlay zoning districts in the City.	R	YR. 1
PRO-5	Generate a list of ready-made historic preservation projects eligible for Certified Local Government grant funding.	NR	YR. 1
PRO-6	Develop a network of historic preservation advocates to support historic preservation efforts in the City.	NR	YR. 3
PRO-7	Coordinate with the Planning Board and City Commission in the implementation of the Birmingham Plan 2040 to ensure that the historic preservation goals of the City are reflected in broader planning.	R	YR. 2
PRO-8	Adopt a demolition delay ordinance.	R	YR. 1
PRO-9	Incorporate historic preservation values, principles, and processes into municipal policy, facilities planning, and programs at all levels of municipal activity.	R	YR. 4
PRO-10	Create a financial incentive program in Birmingham to support historic property owners in the maintenance and upkeep of their historic buildings.	NR	YR. 5
PRO-11	Resurrect the City's Heritage Home Program to recognize buildings at or older than 100 years of age.	NR	YR. 2
PRO-12	Develop an annual budget and regular allocation of funds to support general historic preservation activity in the City.	NR	YR. 2
PRO-13	Historically designate 40 additional buildings or properties by 2040.	R	YR. 1

GOAL #3 - INFORM & ENGAGE

INF-1	Work with the Birmingham Museum to provide current, accurate descriptions of designated historic resources within the City.	NR	YR. 3
INF-2	Provide unique programming during National Historic Preservation Month every year.	NR	YR. 1+
INF-3	Develop and install historic district signage that is consistent with the wayfinding program for the City.	NR	YR. 4
INF-4	Produce updated historic plaques for all designated historic buildings in the Central Business Historic District.	NR	YR. 1+
INF-5	Create more opportunities for the City to interact with property owners of historic resources.	NR	YR. 3
INF-6	Establish an annual Preservation/Conservation Awards Program to highlight and celebrate preservation and conservation initiatives and achievements by residents and entities in Birmingham.	NR	YR. 5
INF-7	Develop historic tours as a part of the Birmingham Shopping Districts tourism initiatives.	NR	Yr. 3
INF-8	Through city staff, provide technical support to the owners of historic properties on the Michigan State Historic Tax Credit program.	NR	YR. 5
INF-9	Provide regular historic preservation related content in the City's newsletters.	NR	YR. 1+
INF-10	Together with the Birmingham Museum, develop historic context statements for the City's historic resources.	NR	YR. 3

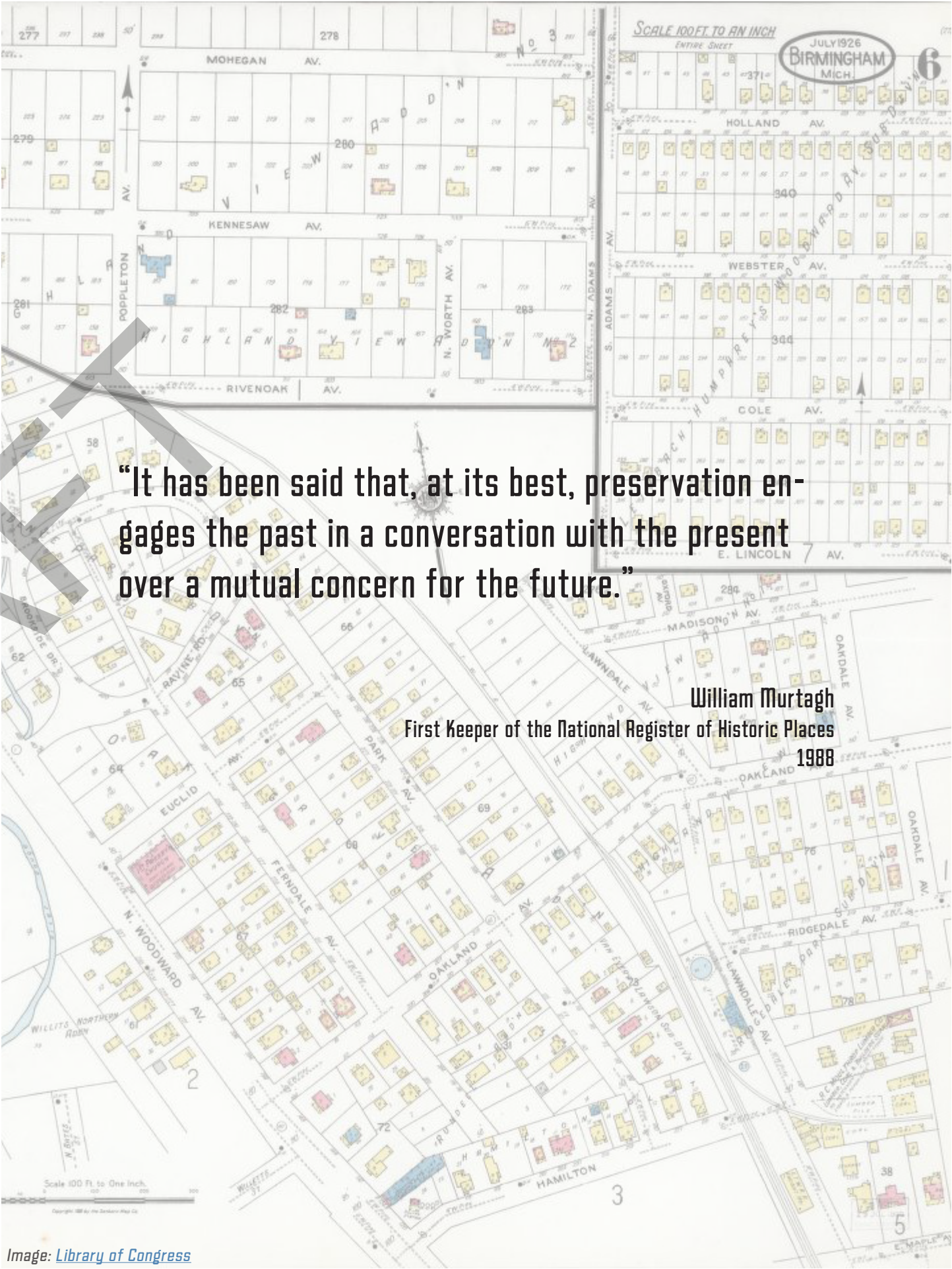


Image: Library of Congress

INTRODUCTION



Historic preservation is often characterized by the unique challenge it presents in the profound questions it asks one to consider. What is important in our history? What parts of our past should we preserve for the future? How can we best transmit our understanding of the past to future generations? Although these questions do not have a singular answer and are often debated, historic preservation has proven to be an enduring, useful, and multi-faceted tool for governments of all levels. As time moves forward, it is important and beneficial to retain a strong commitment to preserving the past. Planning a meaningful, holistic, and long-range strategy for how to do so remains the current challenge.

According to the National Parks Service, **preservation planning is the rational, systematic process by which a community develops a vision, goals, and priorities for the preservation of its historic and cultural resources.** The community seeks to achieve its vision through its own actions and through influencing the actions of others. Goals and priorities are based on analyses of resource data and community values.¹

The City of Birmingham's Planning Department, together with the [Historic District Commission](#), accepted the challenge of developing the City's first Historic Preservation Master Plan and did so based on the following premises:

1. The City has a multitude of resources at its disposal including the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, professional networks, experienced historic property owners, and preservation organizations

- such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Alliance for Preservation Commissions, Michigan Historic Preservation Network, and American Planning Association.
2. Developing the Plan was expected to provide an excellent educational experience for all involved in the process, both for longtime advocates and people new to the field; and
3. Creating the Plan together, from scratch, would provide the community with a sense of ownership over the plan and a responsibility to see it through to the best of our ability.

This Plan is centered in public input, which included historic property owner round tables, surveys, guided discussions, and other unique engagements. This input formed the backbone of the Plan. This Plan goes on to outline all of the essential background information on historic preservation in Birmingham including maps, data, histories and regulations that apply.

As was emphasised by the community, the City developed the recommendations within with a mind towards balancing regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to historic preservation. **Regulatory** approaches to preservation guide and control the environment in which historic preservation is managed through laws and ordinance, and the application of strict guidelines. **Non-regulatory** approaches strategize and problem solve without the use of laws or regulations, often relying on voluntary action, incentives, and education. These terms will be referenced throughout the plan when describing various policies, procedures, or other related issues.

At present, the City boasts 82 designated historic resources and/or sites. Of the 82, 30 are commercial [37%], 12 are public/institutional [15%] and 40 are residential [49%]. There are three contiguous historic districts [Central Business, Shain Park, and Bates Street Historic Districts], while the other districts are considered non-contiguous. In addition to designated historic resources/sites, the City has several neighborhoods with rich histories and many old structures.

To date, Birmingham has long acknowledged the importance and utility of historic preservation. The dedication to historic preservation and the benefits thereof are codified in [Chapter 127 of the Birmingham Code of Ordinances](#), which declares historic preservation to be a public purpose and was designed to:

1. Safeguard the heritage of the city by preserving districts that reflect elements of its history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture.
2. Stabilize and improve property values in each district and surrounding areas.
3. Foster civic beauty.
4. Strengthen the local economy.
5. Promote the use of historic districts for the education, pleasure, and welfare of the citizens of the city and of the state.

With all of the above considered, the current approach to historic preservation in the City has predominantly been a reactive one. That is, the City has mostly managed its existing stock of historic resources through design review and other requests for alterations, and have fielded but a handful of designation requests that have come from homeowners in the last 20 or so years. There have, though, been some admiral efforts to develop more proactive approaches by City Staff, volunteers on the Historic District Commission and Historic District Study Committee, the Birmingham Museum, and interested residents. These efforts produced programs like the Heritage Home Program, educational campaigns, documents such as ["Wallace Frost: His Architecture in Birmingham"](#), and other endeavors. Unfortunately, many of these efforts have been relatively short-lived. This is with the exception of the high-quality and robust programs and exhibits produced by the Birmingham Museum, which has remained a stalwart conservator of Birmingham's heritage and the history of its people and places.

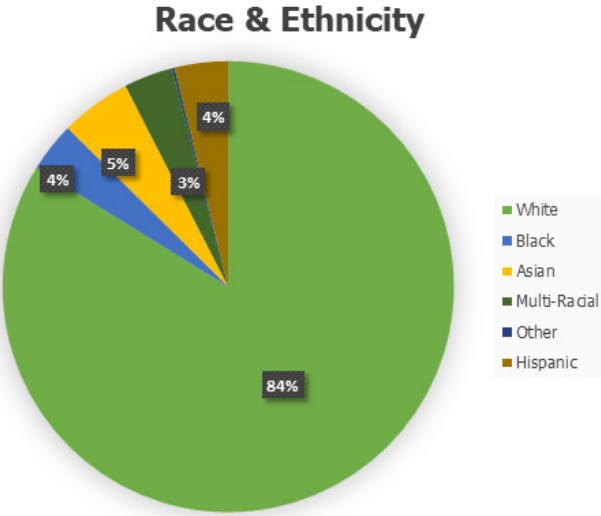
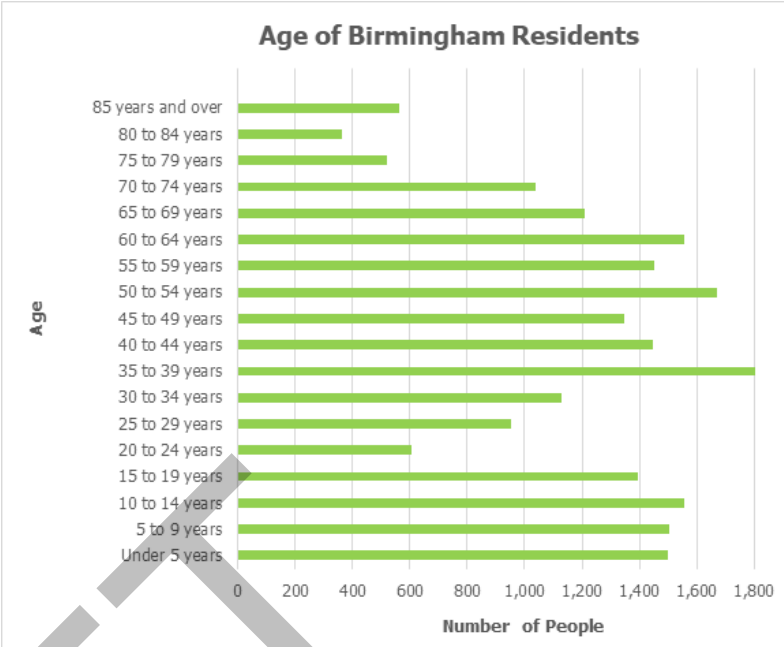
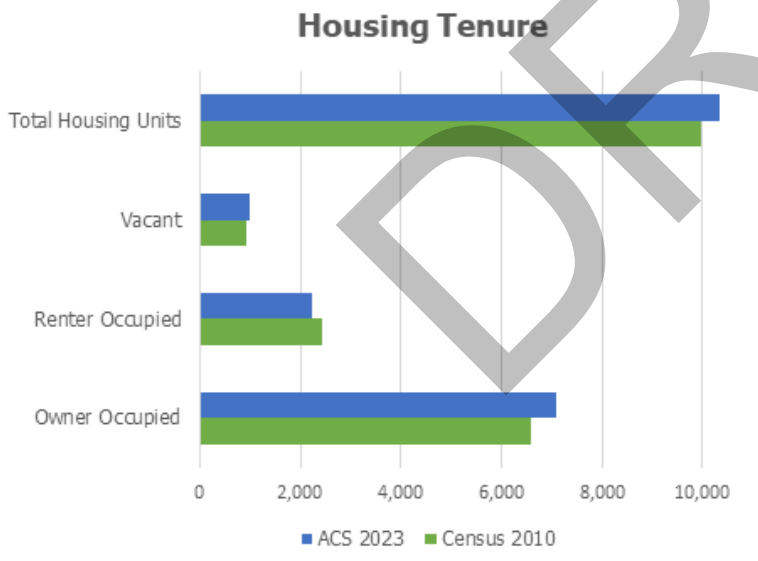
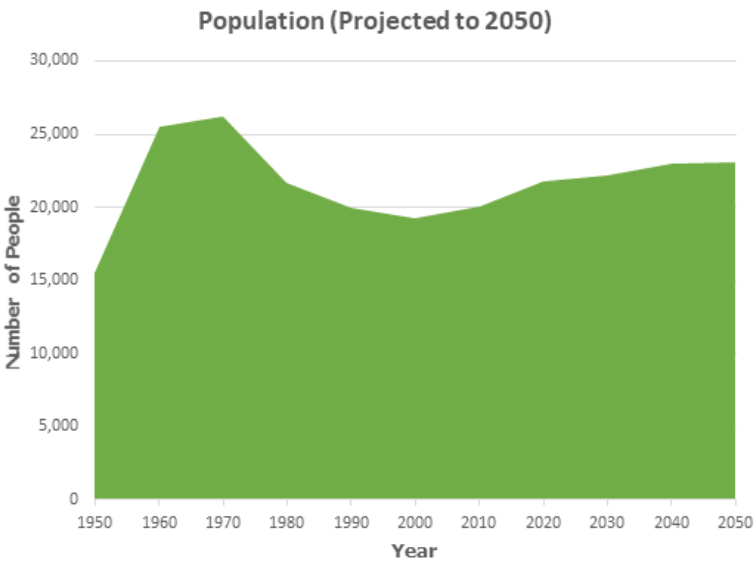
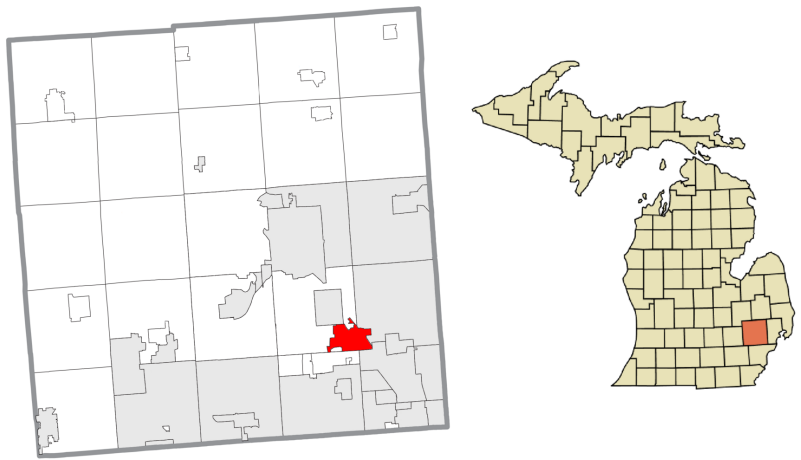
Historic Resources



Birmingham Context

The City of Birmingham, Michigan is a quaint, prosperous, and vibrant suburb of Metro Detroit located approximately halfway between the City of Detroit and the City of Pontiac, in Oakland County. Birmingham has many consequential spatial relationships that have shaped its history including those with the border communities of Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, Beverly Hills, Royal Oak and Troy. Birmingham also shares an asset in the Rouge River with 48 other communities, and exists along the Woodward Avenue corridor, the states first highway.

The City of Birmingham is roughly 5 square miles in area, and houses over 21,000 people. It contains three major commercial areas (most notably its Downtown), all of which are surrounded by single family neighborhoods. Due to this, Birmingham is, and always has been, a center for business, social and cultural activities spanning more than a century.



From the Birmingham Museum

The formal settlement of the area now known as Birmingham occurred over 180 years ago. The pioneer story of this small Michigan community began when three enterprising men purchased the first land parcels at the crossing of the Rouge River and the Saginaw Trail (now Woodward Ave.) in 1818. Elijah Willits, John Hamilton and John West Hunter brought their families onto their combined 480 acres of wilderness land to start new lives. Unlike other pioneering communities that attracted farmers looking only for rich new farmland, Birmingham’s founders diversified, developing new business opportunities relating to the trail and settlement of the area. Foundries, tanneries, blacksmith shops, broom and brick making factories and transportation services were just some of the businesses that were quickly defining this frontier community. Birmingham’s name was chosen by those optimistic about the potential growth of the village, with its manufacturing capabilities after England’s biggest industrial center.

Most of the manufacturers of the 1830s were gone by the 1860s and so were the visions of Birmingham as a major industrial center. Instead the quiet Village of Birmingham emerged as a local commercial and agricultural hub for area farmers. The Eccentric Newspaper, banks, merchants, shop owners and other professionals such as doctors, dentists, and lawyers established successful practices in town. By the 1890s, long-time residents who had worked toward infrastructure, education, and cultural improvements began to see better roads, the development of interurban street car lines, quality public schooling, the establishment of a paid fire department, a clean water supply and a new public library.

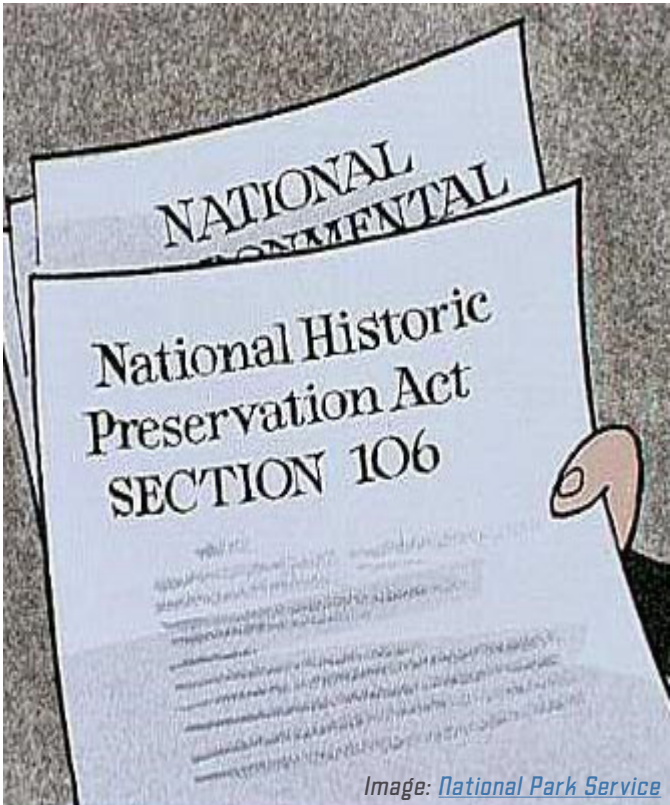
These improvements made Birmingham both quaint and progressive, and its location on Woodward Avenue continued to offer commercial and business opportunities into the 20th century. Farms evolved into small subdivisions and the growing automobile industry in Detroit and Pontiac made Birmingham especially appealing as a place to live. In 1933, after more than a decade of preparation, Birmingham successfully made the transition from a Village to a city governmental structure. Today, Birmingham’s business district and residential areas still enjoy many of the small town charm that characterized days gone by.



Want to explore more Birmingham Census Data?

- [BIRMINGHAM MI CENSUS PROFILE](#)
- [BIRMINGHAM - DATA COMMONS](#)

History of Preservation in Birmingham



The modern historic preservation movement in the United States started in 1966 with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. This Act codified many of the practices of historic preservation in the United States, establishing funding methods, encouraging local historic preservation, and establishing definitions for historic preservation relative to the legal boundaries of property ownership.² In general, it was a reaction to the loss of landmark buildings (like the Penn Central Station in New York City), but also the sweeping changes that were being seen across the country in urban areas that razed entire blocks, neighborhoods, commercial corridors and major buildings. In addition, the Act also established a State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in every state, including Michigan. SHPO's have their own preservation policies and programs and often act as an intermediary between local and national government, particularly when it comes to funding.

Shortly after the establishment of the SHPO in Michigan, [Public Act 169 of 1970](#) was adopted, which provided for several local activities such as (but not limited to) the following:

1. The establishment of historic districts.
2. The acquisition of certain resources for historic preservation purposes.
3. Preservation of historic and non-historic resources within historic districts.
4. The establishment of historic district commissions.
5. The maintenance of publicly owned resources by local units.

In 1977, the City of Birmingham created its own regulatory body to oversee historical preservation, which at the time was called the "Historic District and Design Review Commission." After some time, the ordinances were amended in 2006 to better align with PA 169 and to provide property owners in the City of Birmingham with better access to the Michigan Historic Preservation Tax Credits. As a part of this exercise, the Historic District and Design Review Commission was split into two separate bodies: the Historic District Commission and the Design Review Board.

In addition, the 2006 updates were made to pave the way for Birmingham to be eligible to become a [Certified Local Government](#). The Certified Local Government (CLG) program is a preservation partnership between local, state, and national governments focused on promoting strong local historic preservation programs. The CLG program is jointly administered by the National Park Service and the State Historic Preservation Office.³ The City of Birmingham became certified for the program in 2010. As a part of the CLG program, the City of Birmingham (along with 42 other Michigan communities as of November 2025) have exclusive access to funding and technical assistance to develop and maintain strong preservation programs in their respective communities.

The 2010 CLG designation and associated process was the last substantive change to the way that the Historic District Commission operates in its current form. In the background of all of those changes, the City's Planning Department has supported the work of the Historic District Commission from its inception, acting as liaisons between the HDC, City Hall, and the broader community.

Preservation Organizations

There are many organizations in the historic preservation space in Michigan ranging from governmental or non-profit organizations to corporations and educational institutions. In Birmingham, relationships with various organizations can vary in terms of regulatory versus non-regulatory, and can be required or voluntary depending on the organization. Below are a list of the main external organizations that are regular fixtures in the historic preservation work in the City:



The Michigan SHPO's main function is to provide technical assistance to local communities and property owners in their efforts to identify, evaluate, designate, interpret and protect Michigan's historic above and below-ground resources. The SHPO also administers incentive programs that include federal and state rehabilitation tax credits, and pass-through grants available to Certified Local Government communities.⁴



The Michigan Historic Preservation Network supports the sustainability and economic viability of Michigan's historic places through advocacy, education, and direct action.⁵



The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The National Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout the country and the world.⁶



The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) provides technical support and manages an information network to help local commissions accomplish their preservation objectives. NAPC also serves as an advocate at federal, state and local levels of government to promote policies and programs that support preservation commission efforts.⁷



The U.S. Department of the Interior protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and affiliated Island Communities.⁸



Birmingham Historic District Design Guidelines

In 2021, the City was awarded a grant through the Certified Local Government program to create the City’s first set of comprehensive historic preservation design guidelines. The design guidelines were intended to synthesize and summarize 50+ years of historic preservation efforts in the City while also equipping the Birmingham Historic District Commission to be better suited to perform their duties in an environment where development pressures are tremendous and ongoing. Design guidelines are an important facet of the historic design review process, as they provide consistency in design review, a basis for making fair decisions, incentives for investment, property value enhancement and are an important educational tool.

Birmingham’s Historic District Design Guidelines, formally adopted in 2023, contain a multitude of information. However, the guidelines are especially crucial in providing technical and contextual recommendations on how to approach key issues during design review processes that are both common in Birmingham as well as common in most communities across the country. These historic design guidelines contain a wealth of information, thus heavily informed the content of this Plan and efforts were made to avoid being duplicative. **The Birmingham Historic District Design Guidelines should be considered a sister document to this Plan.** The Guidelines are split up into seven key sections:



Interested in reading more?

- [BIRMINGHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES](#)
- [BIRMINGHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY](#)
- [NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE - PRESERVATION BRIEFS](#)

What are the Historic District Design Guidelines Used For?

Historic District Design Guidelines are a tool for many. For residents, developers, property owners, architects, contractors, or similar stakeholders - they offer a starting point in terms of planning for alterations. These stakeholders can gain helpful insight as to how the City of Birmingham considers various issues, such as window replacements or painting, and the various approaches the City may take based on the conditions of the site.

For members of the HDC and City Staff, the Guidelines serve as an additional layer of insight into best practices and the appropriateness of proposals. Although the Guidelines contain no regulatory standards, they are based on the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards the Treatment of Historic Properties, which are discussed in detail in the following section. In addition, Birmingham’s Guidelines are influenced by the National Park Service’s Preservation Briefs, which have been a staple resource for preservation commissions around the country for decades. The underlying guiding principle that is used by the HDC when utilizing the Guidelines is the hierarchy of treatment:

Heirarchy of Treatment for Historic Properties

- 1. Preservation:** Focuses on maintaining and repairing existing historic materials and retaining the property’s form as it has evolved over time.
- 2. Rehabilitation:** Allows for altering or adding to a historic property to meet new uses while retaining its historic character. This is the most commonly used and flexible standard.
- 3. Restoration:** Depicts a property at a particular period of its history and removes evidence of other periods.
- 4. Reconstruction:** Re-creates a non-extant feature in an accurate historic manner and is the most interventionist approach.⁹



Secretary of the Interior’s (SOI) Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

Chapter 127 of the Birmingham Code of Ordinances states that “In reviewing plans, the [Historic District] Commission shall follow the **U.S. secretary of the interior’s standards for rehabilitation** and guidelines for rehabilitating historic buildings as set forth in [36 C.F.R. part 67](#). Design review standards and guidelines that address special design characteristics of historic districts administered by the commission may be followed if they are equivalent in guidance to the Secretary of Interior’s Standards and guidelines and are established or approved by the state historic preservation office of the Michigan Historical Center.”

What are the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation?

Actually, this question is more nuanced than one might imagine. Starting at a higher level, the NPS states that the purpose of the SOI Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings is to provide guidance to historic building owners and building managers, preservation consultants, architects, contractors, and project reviewers prior to beginning work.¹⁰ It is worth highlighting that the Standards for

the Treatment of Historic Properties addresses four treatments: *preservation*, *rehabilitation*, *restoration*, and *reconstruction*. Notably, the Birmingham Code of Ordinances only addresses one of the four treatments in rehabilitation.

The SOI Standards have a [rich history](#), having first been codified in 1977 in 36 CFR Part 67 and updated most recently in 1995. In the most recent update, the SOI Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties was developed to provide a for a broader framework encompassing the aforementioned treatments, within which the SOI Standards for Rehabilitation became a more specific set of standards under that broader umbrella.¹¹ Both, however, are regulatory standards that are crucial pieces of not only local historic design review processes, but also many tax incentive programs at the local, state and federal levels of government.

In stating that the SOI Standards are regulatory, it is also apparent in the reading of them that they are intentionally general, allowing the interpreters of such the ability to factor in important local considerations such as level of significance, physical condition, proposed use, and codes and other regulations.

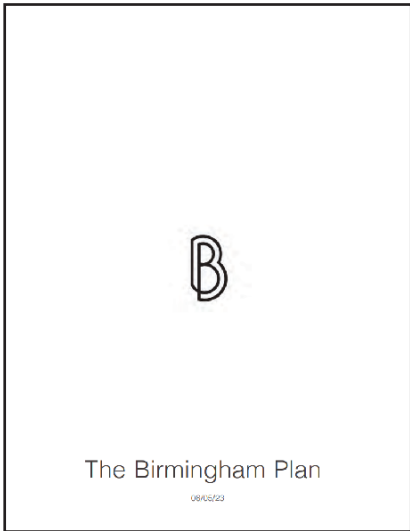
SOI Standards for Rehabilitation

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Master Planning

The City of Birmingham is at an inflection point in terms of the next 20+ years of planning and policy. In the last two years, three different master plans have been adopted in the City, with this plan as the fourth to follow. In developing each plan, the City has woven threads across these recent master plans to get them working together in a cohesive and consistent direction, which provides residents and City leadership with certainty and confidence in decision making processes. It also helped to ensure that each effort was not repetitive, and that they are being supported by one another as implementation progresses.

In addition, there are updates undertaken to other plans, particularly at the state level. The Michigan SHPO is required by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to develop a statewide historic preservation plan at regular intervals, informed by public input, to identify broad preservation priorities and goals. The next version of the Michigan Statewide Historic Preservation Plan is expected to be completed in 2027, and will carry through to 2034.



1. Adjust residential zone boundaries and standards to better match existing housing. This requires a study of the city's residential architectural styles and building types, their key characteristics, position on their properties, driveway configuration, age, and the areas where each common type is located.
2. Adopt a policy to proactively establish new historic districts as well as landmarks.

There are other parts of this master plan that will require the HDC to assist the Planning Board and City Commission. For example, current and future eligible contiguous historic districts may not fit nicely within the proposed neighborhood boundaries in the 2040 Plan and may prove to be disadvantageous to establishing new historic districts. For one, the Bates Street Historic District is currently split between two proposed neighborhoods – the Downtown and Barnum neighborhoods (only one historic property is split off, but the point stands).

As another example, there are parts of the 2040 Plan that envision greater density. Any recommendations that work towards achieving those goals should be reviewed carefully, as encouraging higher density uses and raising the highest and best use of the land could see the removal of swaths of historically significant houses or buildings. This is a common issue when balancing zoning and preservation, and is totally manageable when the parties communicate effectively and often.

Although these conflicts exist, the 2040 Plan and the Historic Preservation Master Plan can work together to achieve a common goal by considering the recommendations within each plan together.

The [Birmingham Plan 2040](#) (“2040 Plan”) is the first master plan in over two decades to provide for recommendations that are directly related to historic preservation in the City. Generally, historic preservation efforts are much more successful when they are integrated within general planning efforts, rather than a niche function operating alone under the planning umbrella.

Chapter 3: Retain Neighborhood Quality

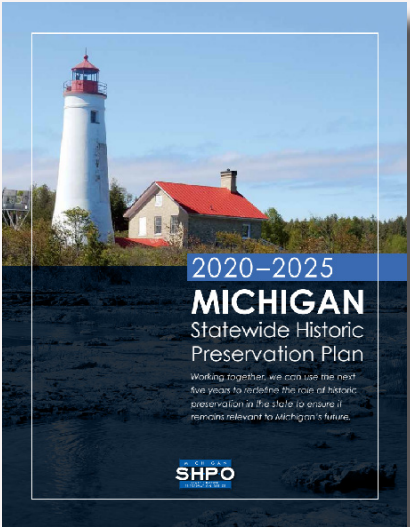
This chapter of the 2040 Plan is where this Plan will draw its strongest corollary. In the “Retain Housing Character” section of this plan, it suggests that many Birmingham neighborhoods have lost touch with sense of scale and coordination with the broader area. The 2040 Plan goes on to provide two specific recommendations that lend themselves to supporting historic preservation and a stronger commitment to such:



The [Birmingham Green: Healthy Climate Plan](#) (“Green Plan”) was adopted in 2024 and was the first plan of its kind both in its subject matter (sustainability & climate action), but also its approach. The Green Plan could be considered the City’s most broad-based active plan in terms of its scope, but also the level of necessary involvement from every aspect of government, residents, institutions and private entities. The Green Plan draws several parallels to historic preservation, and boasts a recommendation that suggests that the City should “Expand the City’s historic preservation program to protect existing buildings and character”



The [Birmingham Parks and Recreation Master Plan](#) (“P&R Plan”) was adopted in December of 2023. As the most loosely connected plan in terms of its relationship to historical preservation, the strategy lies in the supportive function of parks and open space to the historic areas of the City. In fact, some City parks even exist within historic districts themselves. When considering improvements to these parks, the HDC can leverage the stated goals of the P&R Plan to expand the reach of historic preservation where appropriate. The City of Birmingham is required to update its Parks and Recreation plan every 5 years to maintain eligibility for state and federal grants. The next opportunity to update the P&R Plan will be in 2028.



The [Michigan Statewide Historic Preservation Plan](#) (“MI Plan”) in its most recent form was adopted in 2020 and is in the process of being updated. The MI Plan focuses on building up Michigan to be a model of successful historic preservation through shared awareness, engagement and investment. The current plan contains 5 goals and 23 associated recommendations. Overall, the MI Plan is a useful tool to ensure that preservation efforts in Birmingham are reflected in state goals, but also that the City’s goals may be supported by the state, which acts as a pass-through for many grants as well as a treasure trove of educational opportunities and technical support.



The Birmingham Museum

The [Birmingham Museum](#) was established in May 2001 at the former Marion and Harry Allen House and surrounding four acres. It includes the oldest house in Oakland County, the 1822 John West Hunter House as well as the 1928 Allen House. These historic structures are linked by a public plaza, the gateway to the grounds, which were dedicated in 2007 as the John West Hunter Historic Park. The landscape includes some of the most complex and diverse topography, including a spring fed pond and connection to the Rouge River corridor, all just a short walk from downtown Birmingham. The Allen House features changing exhibits about Birmingham and its heritage, while the Hunter House (also listed on the National Register of Historic Places) reflects 19th century pioneer life in the settlement.

The museum works in partnership with other community organizations, such as the Friends of the Birmingham Museum (also known as the Birmingham Historical Society) and the Baldwin Public Library. Together, they provide public tours, entertaining lectures, and special events, such as our popular adult lecture series. Twice a year, the Friends host guided tours of historic Greenwood Cemetery, and also provide self-guided tours for visitors all year round. They also assist with lectures and historic research, a specialized service are also available at the museum.

Recently, the Historic District Commission and Historic District Study Committee (HDSC) have utilized the resources of the Birmingham Museum in several ways. In one example, in researching and developing reports for the review of proposed alterations, City Staff has been requesting historical photographs from the Museum to get a sense for context, materials, design elements and other important considerations when applying the Heirarchy of Treatment for Historic Properties. The Museum also recently played an integral role in the recent designation of the Frederick E. Good House. The Museum provided critical research into the home and its first occupants, which helped make the case for designation.

The Birmingham Museum also maintains and regularly updates a strategic plan. The current strategic plan is in the process of being updated and is expected to be adopted in early 2026. Much of the Museum’s strategic plan is built upon its mission, which aligns closely with the goals of this plan:

“The Birmingham Museum will explore meaningful connections with our past, in order to enrich our community and enhance its character and sustainability. Our mission is to promote understanding of Birmingham’s historical and cultural legacy through preservation and interpretation of its ongoing story.”



Want to know more about the Birmingham Museum?

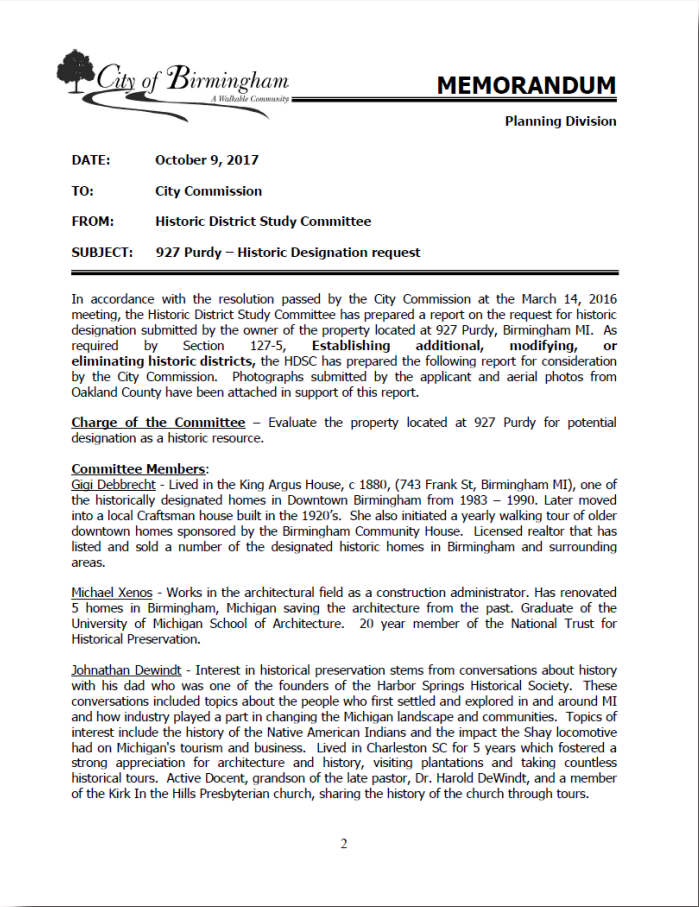
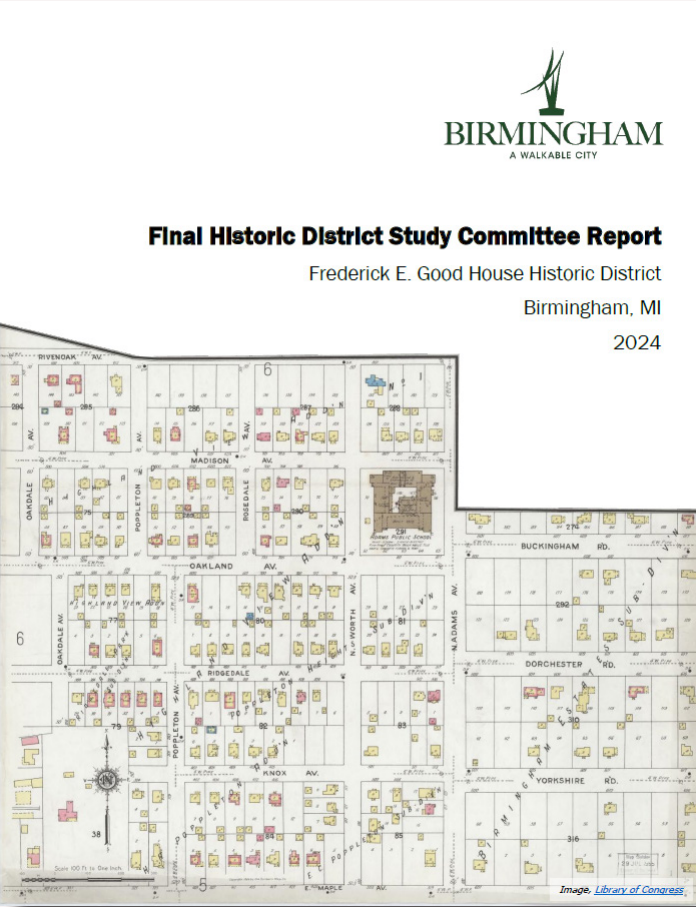
- [BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM STRATEGIC PLAN 2026](#)
- [INSTAGRAM](#)
- [YOUTUBE](#)
- [FACEBOOK](#)

The Historic District Study Committee

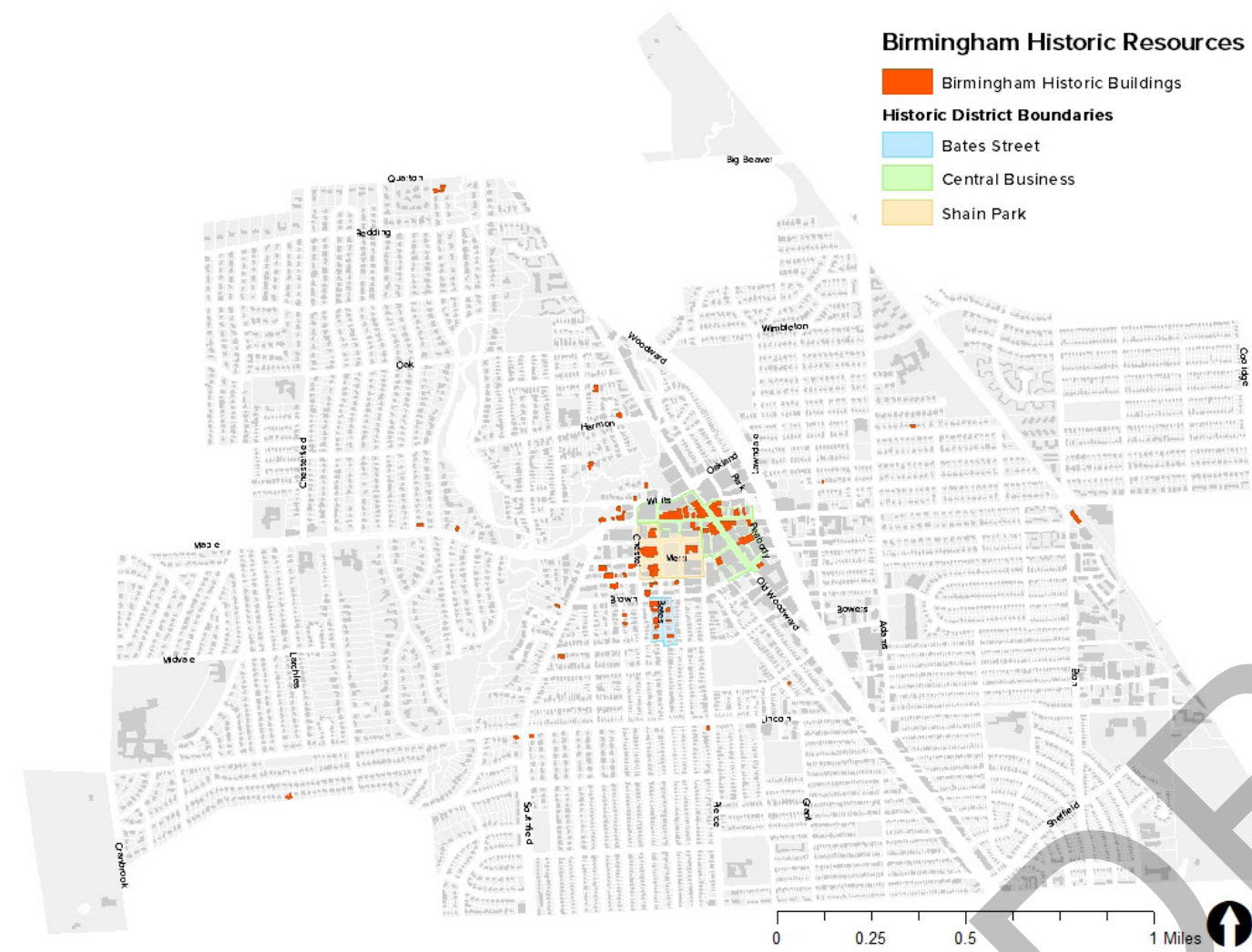
Although the role of Birmingham’s [Historic District Study Committee](#) (HDSC) is related to historic preservation, it is a very different role than that of the HDC. It may even be fair to say that at this time, the role of the HDSC is completely one-dimensional in that their sole purpose, as outlined in Chapter 127 of the Birmingham City Code, is to produce reports to the City Commission for the historic designation of properties. These reports are developed with strict guidelines and checkpoints, involve heavy research, and require the collection of information on historical significance, all of which come together to form a recommendation on the qualifications of the building or property based on 36 CFR Part 60 and criteria established or approved by the SHPO.

The HDSC consists of seven members with “a clearly demonstrated interest in or knowledge of historic preservation.” A unique aspect of this group is that it is one of few boards, commissions or committees in the City in which city residency is not required if an expert on the potential historic district topic is not available among city residents. Another unique requirement of the HDSC is that the group may only meet when directed by a resolution of the City Commission, and has historically been limited to its singular purpose of producing Historic District Study Committee Reports.

In the last 20+ years, records suggest that the HDSC and City Commission have only designated 2 properties as historic, although other attempts were started but not able to be seen through to completion. The two designations occurred in 2017 and 2024. These two designations, separated by 7 years, contained all of the same required information, but took different approaches in terms of presentation. Ultimately, consistency is a goal of the HDSC and the focus will continue to be on design and approachability to encourage readership.



DATA & MAPPING



Non-Contiguous Historic Districts

1. Hood House Historic District, 555 Stanley
 2. Grooms House Historic District, 587 Stanley
 3. Trollop House Historic District, 536 Southfield Road
 4. Richard Erwin House Historic District, 1119 Southfield Road
 5. Randall-Latham House Historic District, 1128 Southfield Road
 6. Daniels House Historic District, 1128 Pierce
 7. Eli Wooster House Historic District, 1876 Northlawn
 8. Schlaack House Historic District, 839 Knox
 9. King-Argus House Historic District, 743 West Frank
10. Stewart-Watkins House Historic District, 146 Puritan
 11. Quarton Homestead Historic District, 1155 Quarton
 12. Birmingham Grand Trunk Western Railroad Depot Historic District, 245 S. Eton
 13. Quarton Maple Avenue House Historic District, 1158 West Maple Road
 14. Wallace Frost House Historic District, 579 Tooting Lane
 15. Almeron Whitehead House Historic District, 927 Purdy
 16. Frederick E. Good House Historic District, 1283 Buckingham

Bates Street Historic District

1. United Presbyterian Parsonage, 539 S. Bates
2. Koontz House, 544 S. Bates
3. Peck House, 571 S. Bates
4. John Hall House, 584-588 S. Bates
5. Major Jones House, 607 S. Bates
6. Frank Schlaack House, 612 S. Bates
7. John W. Perry House, 651 S. Bates
8. McBride House, 668 S. Bates

Central Business Historic District

1. Wabeek Building, 256 W. Maple
2. Leonard Building, 166 W. Maple
3. Quarton Building, 142 W. Maple
4. Blakeslee Building, 138 W. Maple
5. Billy McBride Building, 122 W. Maple
6. Ford Building, 101 N. Old Woodward and 120 W. Maple
7. Erity and Nixon Building, 163-167 N. Old Woodward
8. Bell Building, 191 N. Old Woodward
9. Schlaack Building and Huston Building 1916, 205-219 N. Old Woodward
10. Huston Building 1923, 237-243 N. Old Woodward
11. National Bank Building, 152-176 N. Old Woodward
12. Wooster Building, 132-136 N. Old Woodward
13. Parks Building, 110-116 N. Old Woodward
14. Madison Building, 297-323 E. Maple
15. Hawthorne Building, 361 E. Maple
16. Shain Townhouses, 378, 386, 390 E. Maple and 112, 120, 124 Brownell
17. Briggs Building, 111 S. Old Woodward
18. Birmingham Theater Building, 211 S. Old Woodward
19. Ford-Peabody Mansion, 325 S. Old Woodward
20. Detroit Edison Building, 220 E. Merrill
21. O.U.R. Waiting Room, 138 S. Old Woodward
22. McBride Building, 124-128 S. Old Woodward
23. Johnston-Shaw Building, 112-114 S. Old Woodward
24. O'Neal Building, 106-110 S. Old Woodward
25. St. Clair Edison Building, 135-159 Pierce
26. Telephone Exchange Building, 148 Pierce
27. Bigelow-Shain Building, 115 W. Maple
28. Field Building, 135-141 W. Maple

Shain Park Historic District

1. Municipal Building, 151 Martin Street
2. Shain Park
3. Baldwin Public Library, 300 Merrill Street

4. Birmingham Community House, 380 S. Bates
5. United States Post Office, 322 Martin

Mill Pond Neighborhood

1. Historical Park Historic District
2. Baldwin Park Historic District
3. John W. Hunter House and Allen House, 500 and 556 West Maple
4. Mill Pond Historic District
5. Village Waterworks Historic District
6. Chatfield-Campbell House Historic District, 460 W. Maple
7. Edwin Baldwin House Historic District, 484 W. Maple
8. Edgar Lamb House Historic District, 474 Willits
9. Stickney House Historic District, 412 Willits
10. Ebenezer Raynale House Historic District, 300 Warren Court
11. Benjamin Daniels House Historic District, 372 Harmon
12. Greenwood Cemetery Historic District

Merrill-Townsend-Brown Neighborhood

1. Abigail Carter House Historic District, 415 Merrill Street
2. Irving House Historic District, 439 Merrill
3. Daisy Benedict House Historic District, 535 Merrill
4. Hewitt House Historic District, 211 Townsend
5. Langley House Historic District, 404 S. Bates
6. Townsend House Historic District, 339 Townsend
7. Toms-Dickinson House Historic District, 464 Townsend
8. Hoston-Logan House Historic District, 504-506 Townsend
9. Fall House Historic District, 523 Townsend
10. Schuyler House Historic District, 544 Townsend
11. Cinderilla Patch House Historic District, 347 W. Brown
12. William Bell House Historic District, 384 West Brown



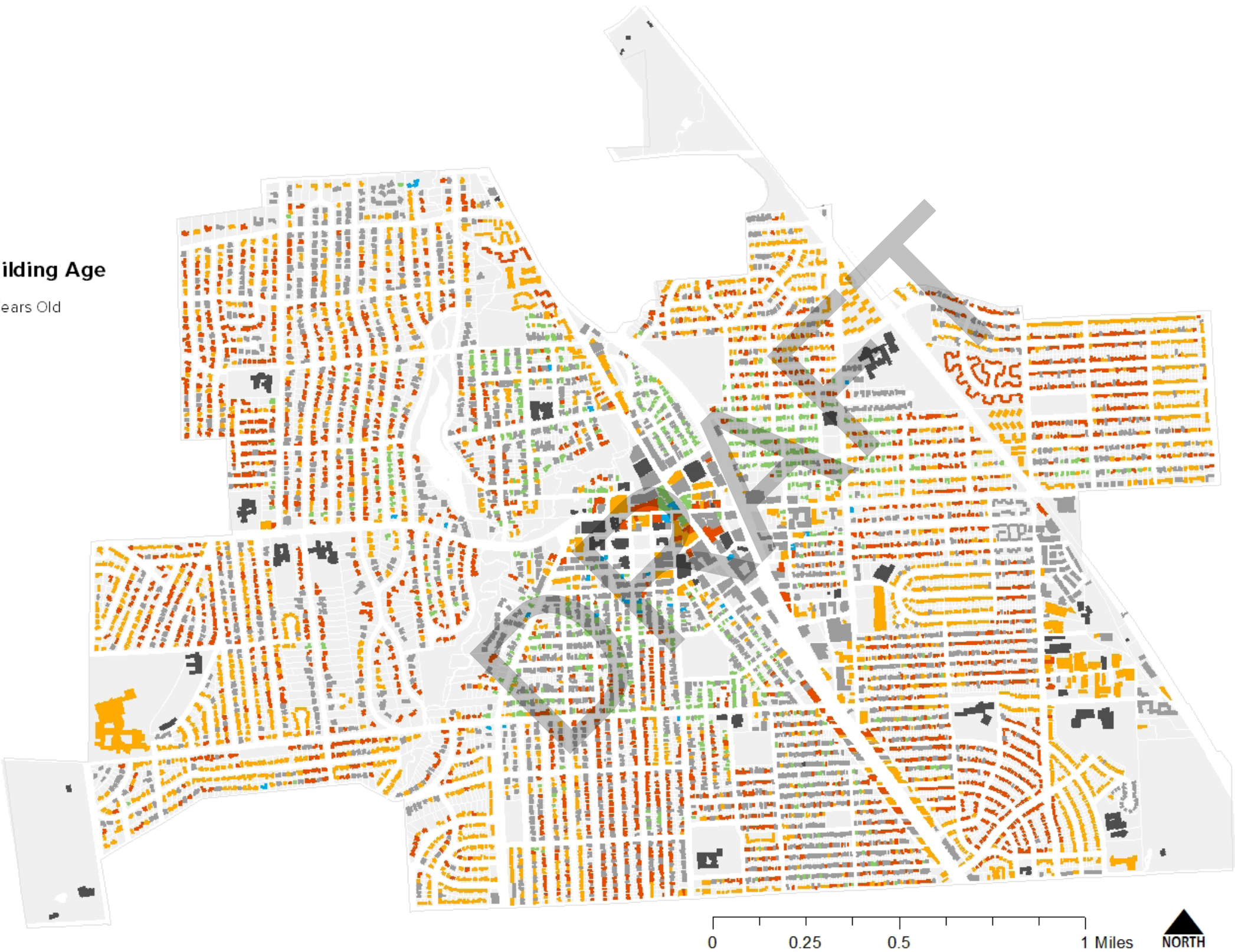
The official list of designated historic resources is maintained in the City Code:

• [CHAPTER 127, SEC. 127-25.](#)

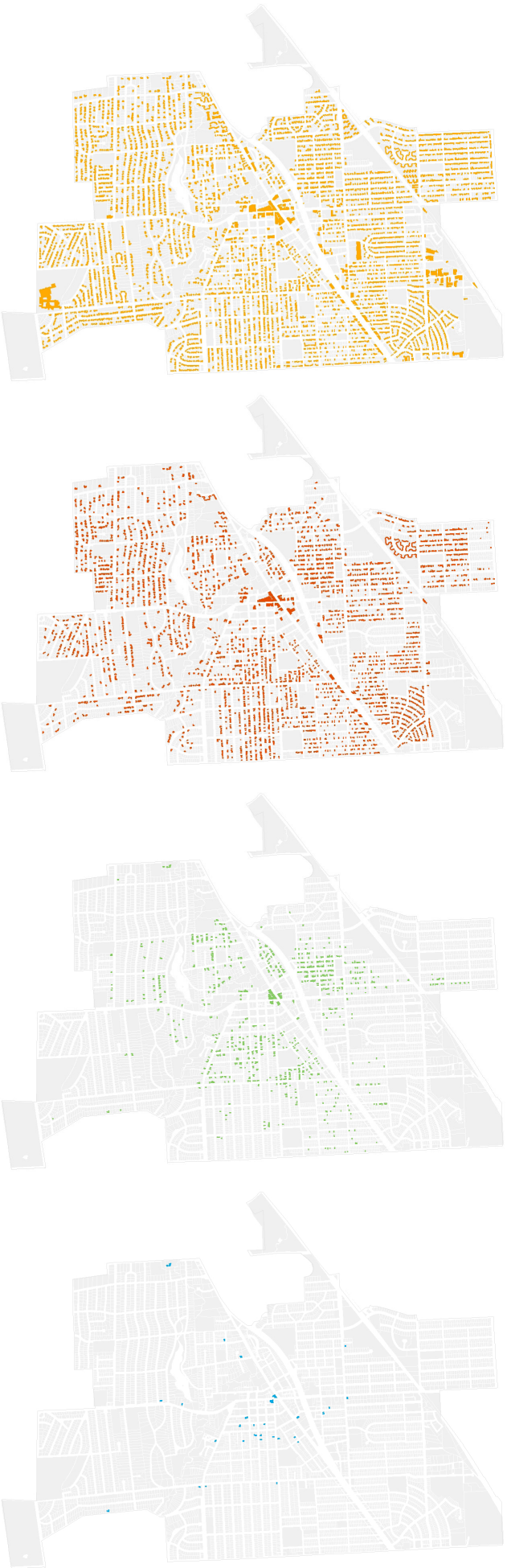
A Deeper Look...

Birmingham Building Age

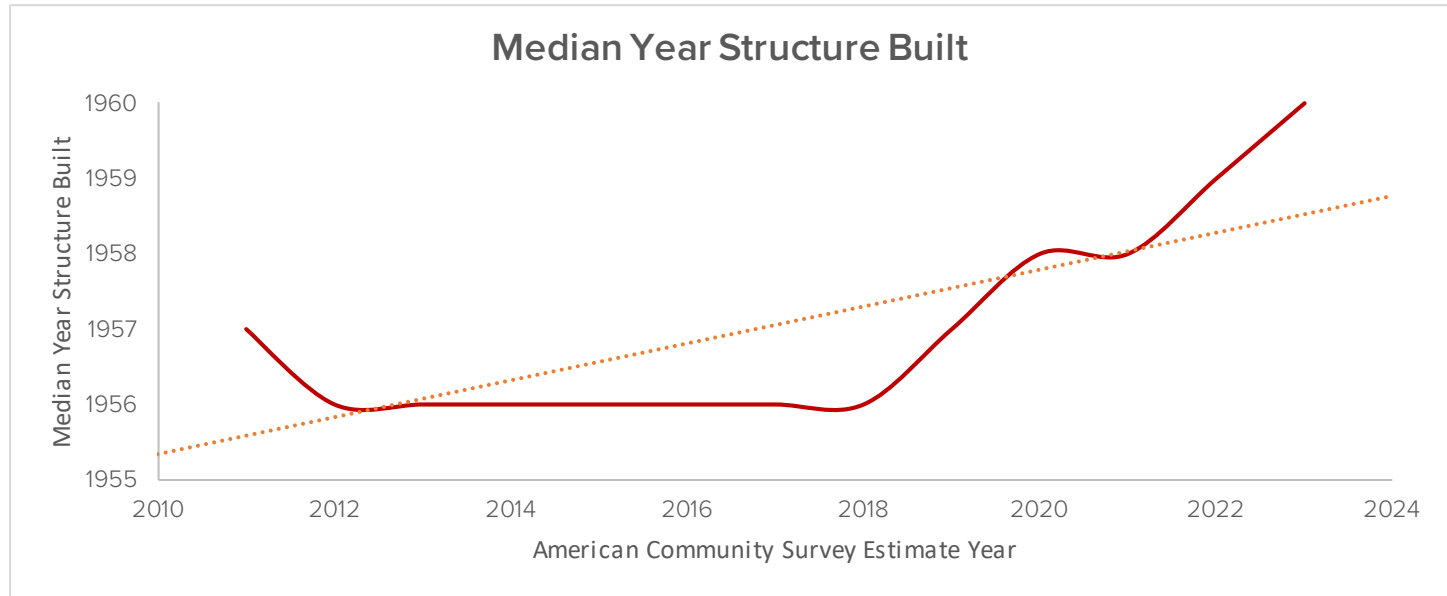
- Less than 50 Years Old
- 50 Years Old
- 75 Years Old
- 100 Years Old
- 125 Years Old
- No Data



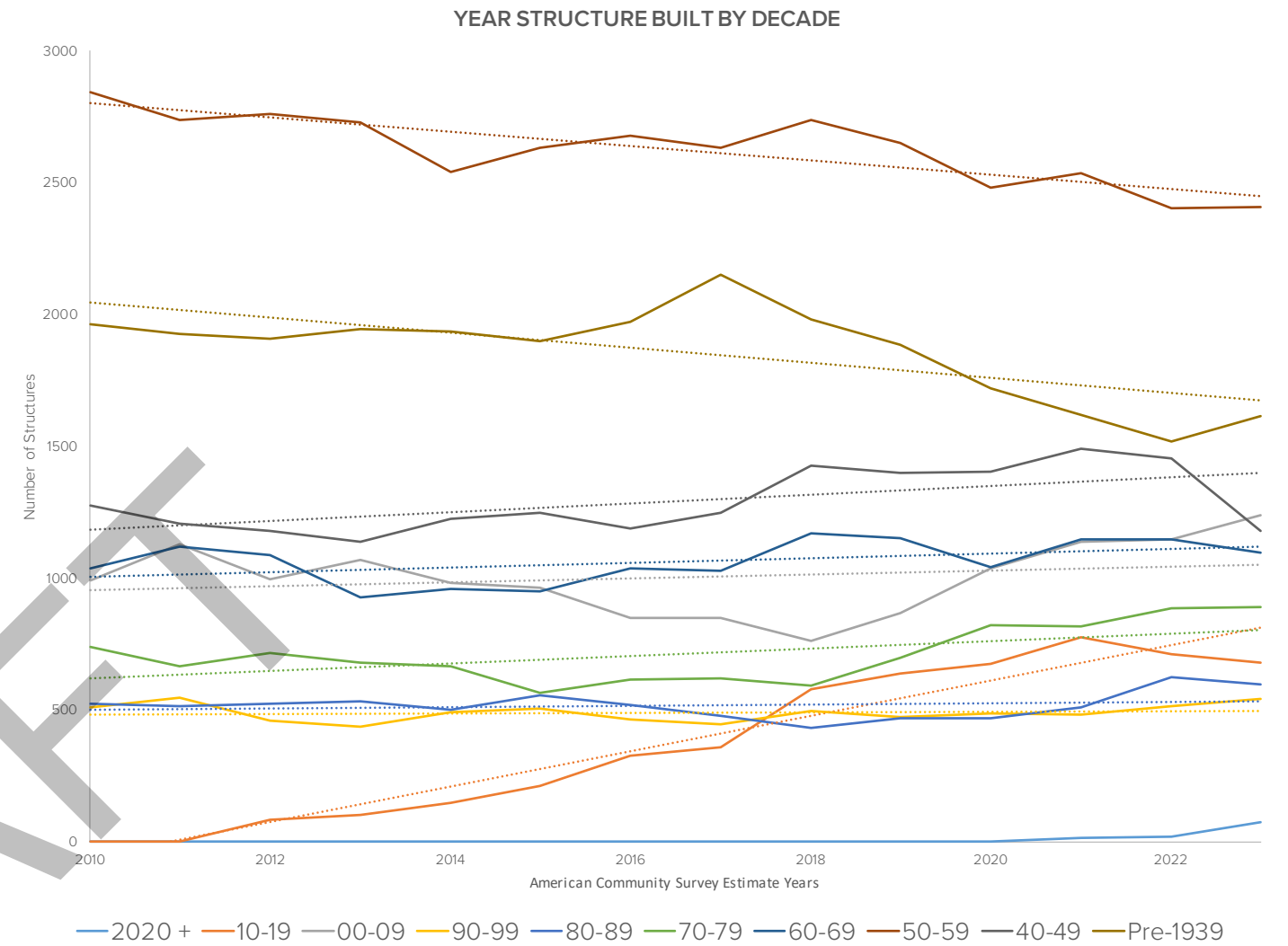
Data Source: [SEMCOG Building Footprints 2024](#)



A Deeper Look Continued...



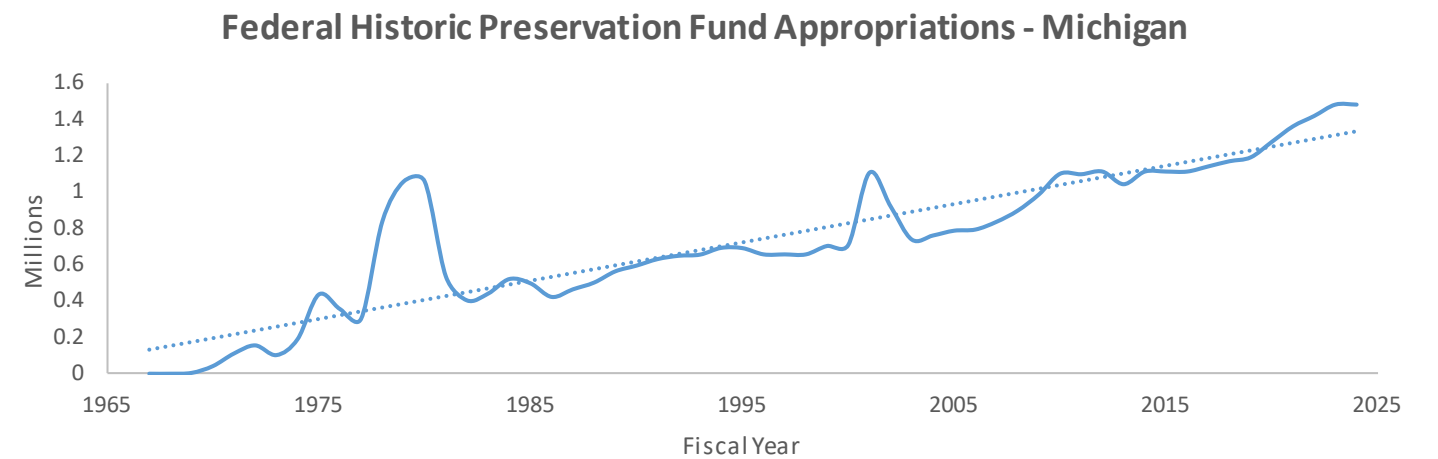
Data Source: U.S. Census: [B2035 Median ear Structure Built](#)



Data Source: U.S. Census: [B25034 Year Structure Built](#)

Federal Funding for Historic Preservation

The National Park Service administers the Historic Preservation Fund on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior and uses annually appropriated funds to provide grants to eligible recipients for the preservation of historic resources.¹² The NPS generates annual reports, which are accessible on their [website](#). The following represents the funding recived by the State of Michigan since the inception of the fund, which shows a steady increase:



Data Source: [National Park Service DataStore Collection 6600](#)

1831

Birmingham's Oldest Building

7,982

Total Principal Buildings

731

Single-Family Homes Demolished since 2015

32

Commercial Buildings Demolished since 2015

736

Buildings over 100 Years Old

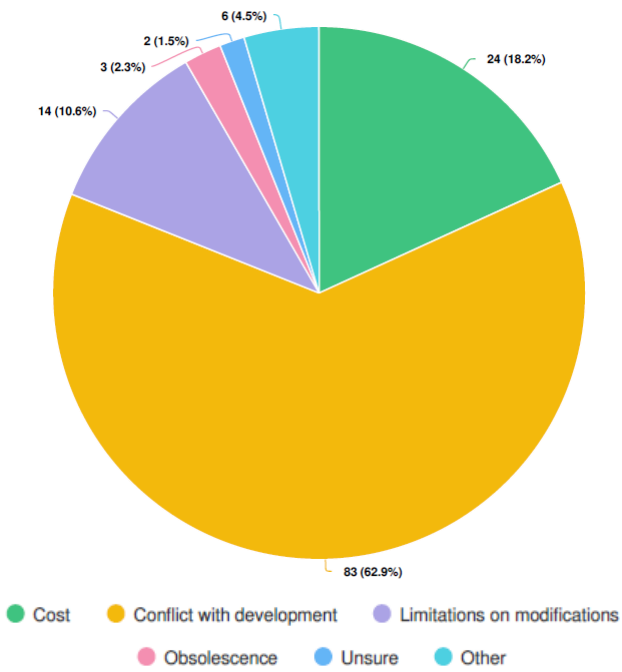
Public Engagement Summary

As is typical in Birmingham, it was a pleasure to engage the community in impassioned discussions about historic preservation. Although historic preservation is often considered a niche field within government and planning, the community showed up, and in turn has made their mark on this planning effort. The depth of knowledge, experience and willingness to discuss challenging issues in this community remains a key contributor to Birmingham’s elevated status in the region.

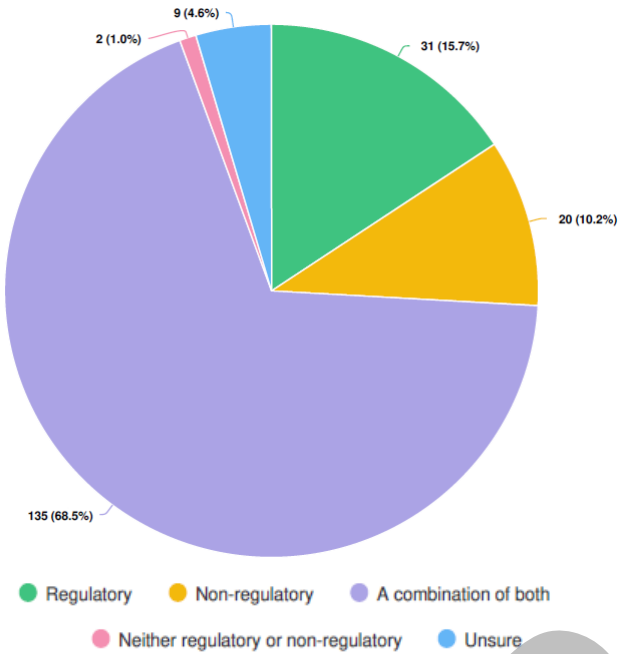
Throughout this process, the HDC was able to provide a multitude of engagement and informational opportunities including nearly **20** HDC meetings, **3** property owner round tables, **1** newspaper article, **2** community presentations, **5** newsletter articles, and countless conversations.

Overall, it was apparent that the community feels strongly about its history and character, and is willing to explore more opportunities to preserve it. This section provides a snapshot of some of the feedback we recieved at the various engagement events.

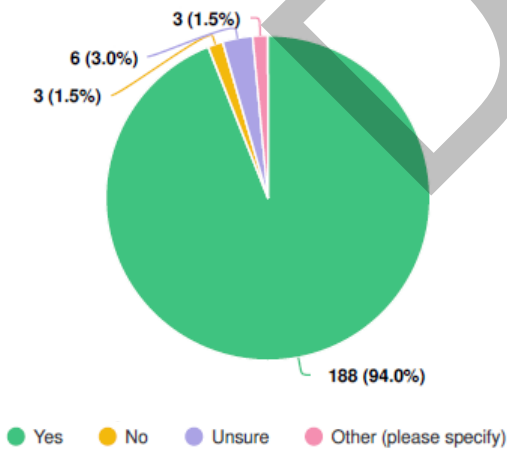
In your opinion, what is the biggest barrier to historic preservation?



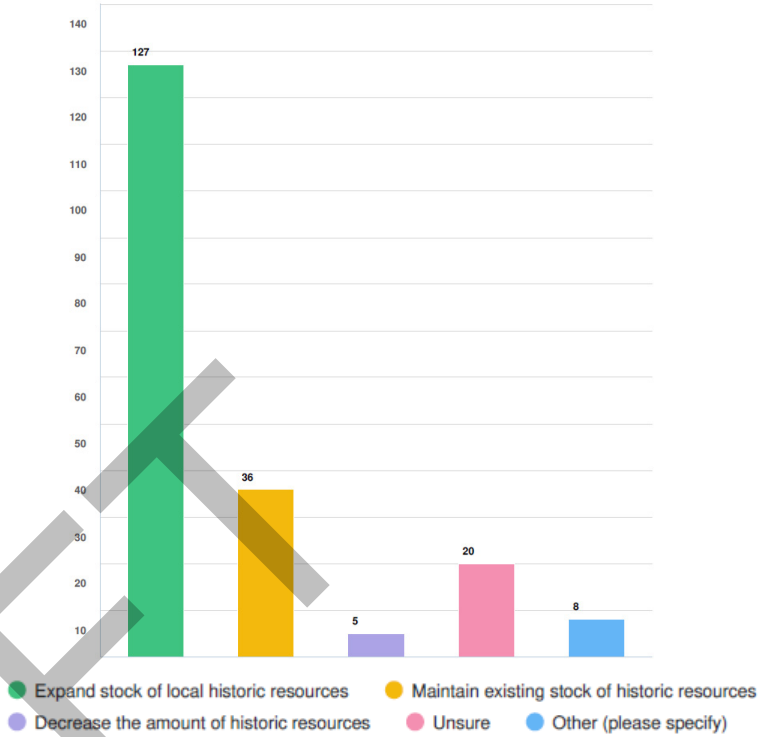
The approach to historic preservation can be simplified in to regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. Which approach do you feel better suits the City of Birmingham?



Do you believe historic preservation is a worthwhile goal?



What direction do you think the City should take in the future regarding the creation of local historic resources (buildings and/or sites)?



“We don’t want to sound negative about the homes lost, but we do believe that there can be a cultural shift in how we look at Birmingham’s oldest homes.”

- L.S. - Birmingham Resident



HISTORIC DESIGNATION

Understanding what it means to be a historically designated historic resource is a critical step to understanding the remainder of this plan. This is a question that is fielded regularly by City Staff and has a relatively straight forward answer in the technical sense. However, there are many other programs or designations that can confuse and complicate the environment for historic preservation. It shall be a goal of this plan to unwind some of the confusion that exists surrounding historic designation and provide a first step towards educating the community on the differences between the various levels of designation.

As an important part of this effort, there is an overarching distinction to be made between the different types of designations a historic building or site can achieve. This distinction is binary in that each designation can be described as either a **protective** designation or a **recognition** designation. Protective designations provide legal restrictions on what can be done on the building or site, while recognition designations offer a celebration of history based on whatever criteria the program exists to promote.

Local Historic Designation

☒ PROTECTIVE ☐ RECOGNITION

Local designation is the most common form of historic designation. In the City of Birmingham, the responsibility to designate a historic resource is held by the City Commission. A request to designate a single building (non-contiguous historic district) or a group of buildings together (contiguous historic district) can come from anyone or any group of people. The request would be considered by the City Commission, directed to the Historic District Study Committee to develop a report and recommendation (if so desired), then back to the City Commission for final consideration.

In the event that the City Commission establishes a new historic district (whether contiguous or non-contiguous), each resource within the district is subject to Chapter 127, [Section 127-10](#) of the Birmingham Code of Ordinances, which gives the Historic District Commis-

sion purview to review any work, such as addition/alteration to the exterior of the resource and/or its site. Each resource would also be subject to the Design Review standards outlined in [Section 127-11](#), which are referred to as the "Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation."

Birmingham Heritage Home Program

☐ PROTECTIVE ☒ RECOGNITION

The Heritage Home Program (sometimes referred to as "Centennial Home" program) in the City of Birmingham was introduced in 2012 for the purpose of recognizing homes constructed 100 years ago or more with a commemorative plaque and certificate that certified a home as a "Heritage Home." Upon the inception of the program, the City presented several plaques to homes throughout the City. Plaques were generally made available upon request from the homeowner without a formal application process, therefore there is little information available to the City as to the program and its participants.

Before fizzling out a couple of years later, the Heritage Home program was able to recognize 51 homes for their age, most of which were accompanied by irreplaceable charm, character and complexity. At this time, it is estimated that nearly half of the homes certified through the Heritage Home program have been either lost to demolition or significantly altered.

National Register of Historic Places

☐ PROTECTIVE ☒ RECOGNITION

The [National Register of Historic Places](#) program is administered by the National Park Service. The program maintains an official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. National Register properties have significance to the history of their community state, or the nation.¹¹ The City of Birmingham currently boasts three properties on the National Register including the Birmingham Grand Trunk Western Railroad Depot and the John W. Hunter House.

Petitioning a property for the National Register does not require it to be designated locally, but the nomination does require a property to meet the same standards that locally designated resources are held to. Properties on the National Register do also open up eligibility for federal preservation tax credits.

Although the placement of a property on the National Register is challenging and prestigious, under Federal Law, the listing of a property in the National Register places no restrictions on what a non-federal owner may do with their property up to and including destruction, unless the property is involved in a project that receives Federal assistance.

National Historic Landmark Program

☒ PROTECTIVE ☐ RECOGNITION

[National Historic Landmarks](#) are buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects that have been determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be nationally significant in American history and culture.¹² Many of the most renowned historic properties in the nation are Landmarks. Mount Vernon, Pearl Harbor, Alcatraz, and Martin Luther King's Birthplace are examples of Landmarks that illustrate important contributions to the nation's historical development.

National Historic Landmark Designations are set at a much higher bar, and are held to a different set of very high standards. All that being said, properties designated as a National Historic Landmark require a review of demolition proposals, but does not prohibit demolition outright. The process required to seek demolition is not a simple or easy process and is typically subject to a thorough review, thus it could be considered more protective than the National Register. Birmingham does not have any listings in the National Historic Landmark Program.

Michigan Historical Marker Program

☐ PROTECTIVE ☒ RECOGNITION

In conversations about historic designation, it is sometimes suggested that properties can be designated by the State of Michigan as historic in some way. Although this is not entirely untrue, it is unlike local designation, or either of the national designations. The [Michigan Historical Marker Program](#) offers properties an opportunity to recognize a property, building or site with a marker, but do not go much further than that. Eligibility for a marker is determined by historic significance at the local, state or national level, and in the case of historic resources, integrity. Birmingham does not have any properties with state historical markers at this time.



ACTION PLAN

In order to achieve the goals of this plan, a series of objectives has been developed by the HDC that reflects best practices, realistic expectations, legal requirements, and resident/stakeholder input. These objectives range in terms of level of effort, regulatory versus non-regulatory, and time horizon. This action plan will serve as a blueprint for implementation, and is structured on the following components:

- **Clear Goals:** Each stated objective was designed to work towards the broader goal to which it is assigned. The HDC used the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) model to develop each objective and this plan will attempt to describe how each objective fits into that framework. It should be noted that with many of the objectives in this plan, measurability may be a simple binary - complete or not.
- **Tasks and Steps:** When it comes to implementation, it is essential to outline the tasks or steps that will be necessary to reach each objective. This plan attempts to provide insight into these steps, but recognizes that conditions can change over time.
- **Responsibilities:** As the implementation of this plan will at times require assistance from numerous different entities and stakeholders, it was important to include them as a part of this plan.
- **Resources:** Generally speaking, it is very advantageous for the City to understand what materials, budget, or tools may be necessary to complete an objective early on in the process, as things like implementation, budget cycles, and staff or volunteer availability often do not align.



Get Back to the Basics [B2B]

To support existing historic resources and create an environment that is conducive to historic preservation.

The Historic Preservation Master Plan recognizes the valuable stock of historic resources that are currently designated within the City. As time marches forward, these resources will need to be maintained and treated consistently against the City's Historic Design Guidelines. In addition, opportunities for monetary support should be prioritized.

B2B-1 - Provide annual training for Historic District Commission and Historic District Study Committee members.

This *non-regulatory* objective intends to provide volunteers on the City’s preservation-related bodies with trainings on the role of a commission or committee member. In order to provide consistent and well rounded education, there are two resources that should be leveraged: Michigan Historic Preservation Network’s (MHPN) Historic District Commissioner Training and the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions’ (NAPC) Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program (CAMP). Both training opportunities require membership, which the City of Birmingham already holds and renews annually. Beyond the cost of a membership, annual costs for the trainings themselves could be in the \$500-\$1000 range. As an added benefit, these trainings could also be open to the public. Scheduling trainings will be the responsibility of the Planning Department as liaisons to each body, and will require taking steps to contact MHPN or NAPC representatives and scheduling trainings at convenient times, most likely during regularly scheduled meetings.

B2B-2 - Perform biennial reviews of all historic district boundaries and resources.

Best practice suggests that communities should regularly review historic district boundaries and resources to track changes, enforce maintenance codes, and propose changes if necessary. The reality of these reviews are that they are time consuming and could generate more work as observations are made. Thus, this *non-regulatory* objective aims to review its stock every other year to allow for city staff or volunteers to manage the project effectively. The HDC will need to build this review into their routine, which could leverage the regular annual report process in which they report to the City Commission their activities for the year and action items for the upcoming year. This approach would also allow the City Commission to become more informed in regards the the City’s historic districts. Preparation for these reviews should begin in 2027 for reporting in 2028. In terms or resources, staff time is the main consideration.

B2B-3 - Update the City’s historic preservation webpage with current information and resources.

Digital resources are becoming more and more of an asset for local governments and their preservation activities. The City’s website is modern and user-friendly, and in many cases acts as an easy entry point for people to learn about the City. At present, the historic preservation related pages of the site are outdated and require a focus shift. This is a *non-regulatory* objective that should be completed as early as possible in 2026, even considering that there may be some digital resources that are not yet available to place on the site. The Planning Department would work closely with the City’s Communications Department, who are the main administrators of the City’s website. This objective could be completed with little in terms of resources.

B2B-4 - Create simple, high quality resources for commonly requested information including (but not limited to) the process for historic designation, what it means to be a designated historic resource, and the “do’s and don’ts” of preservation.

The most common questions that the City gets related to historic preservation are based on what it means to be historically designated and what can or cannot be done on building or site if it is historically designated. These questions often lead to a lot of misconception about historic designation that have proven to be antithetical to the City’s preservation goals. The *non-regulatory* objective to produce these resources is a simple exercise, as the City has much of the necessary information, as well as the technical tools to produce approachable, high quality documents. Based on feedback and experiences shared by HDC & HDSC members as well as the public, this objective should be completed in 2026, as it may be considered an enabler for future objectives.

B2B-5 - Pursue a nomination of City Hall and the Baldwin Public Library to the National Register of Historic Places.

A major theme of the “Back to the Basics” goal is to ensure that in seeking to expand the City’s stock of historically designated resources, we do not forget about the existing stock. These two resources have been contributing to the City’s historic preservation efforts for 100 years. As noted in an earlier section, this objective would be considered *non-regulatory*, as National Register nominations have no protections build in at the federal level. The nomination process for buildings is rather arduous, thus this objective should be considered a lesser priority in comparison to others begining in 2028. Although arduous, there are no application fees or other direct costs to be placed on the National Register. It is anticipated that the Planning Department would work closey with the Birmingham Museum, City Commission, and Michigan State Historic Preservation Office to achieve this objective.



B2B-6 - Review and update historic preservation ordinances to meet current needs.

The City’s historic preservation ordinances are *regulatory*, and are legally necessary to engage in the historic design review processes and other preservation activities in the City. Although the current ordinances appear to be aligned with the requirements of Public Act 169, the City should review these ordinances to ensure that they align with the goals of the City while also maintaining adherence to State and Federal statutes. These updates could be as minor as formatting and grammar, or could be broader changes to the roles and duties of the HDC or HDSC. Because the ordinances are considered legally sound and up to date in terms of design review standards and processes, this objective should be pursued in 2029 after other work from this plan is completed, which is expected to reshape the preservation environemnt in Birmingham. Thus, it would be helpful to ensure that any ordinances reflected that new environment after it is formed. This objective will be carried out by the Planning Department in close coordination with the City Attorney, and will be overseen by the HDC and City Commission. As the historic preservation ordinances are hosted in the Municode online platform, there will be a minor cost to update the language if/when adopted by the City Commission. However, maintnence of the Municode platform is currently budgeted for on an annual basis, so no budget updates are expected to be required.

B2B-7 - Develop policy and procedures for the review of work performed on noncontributing resources/properties within historic districts.

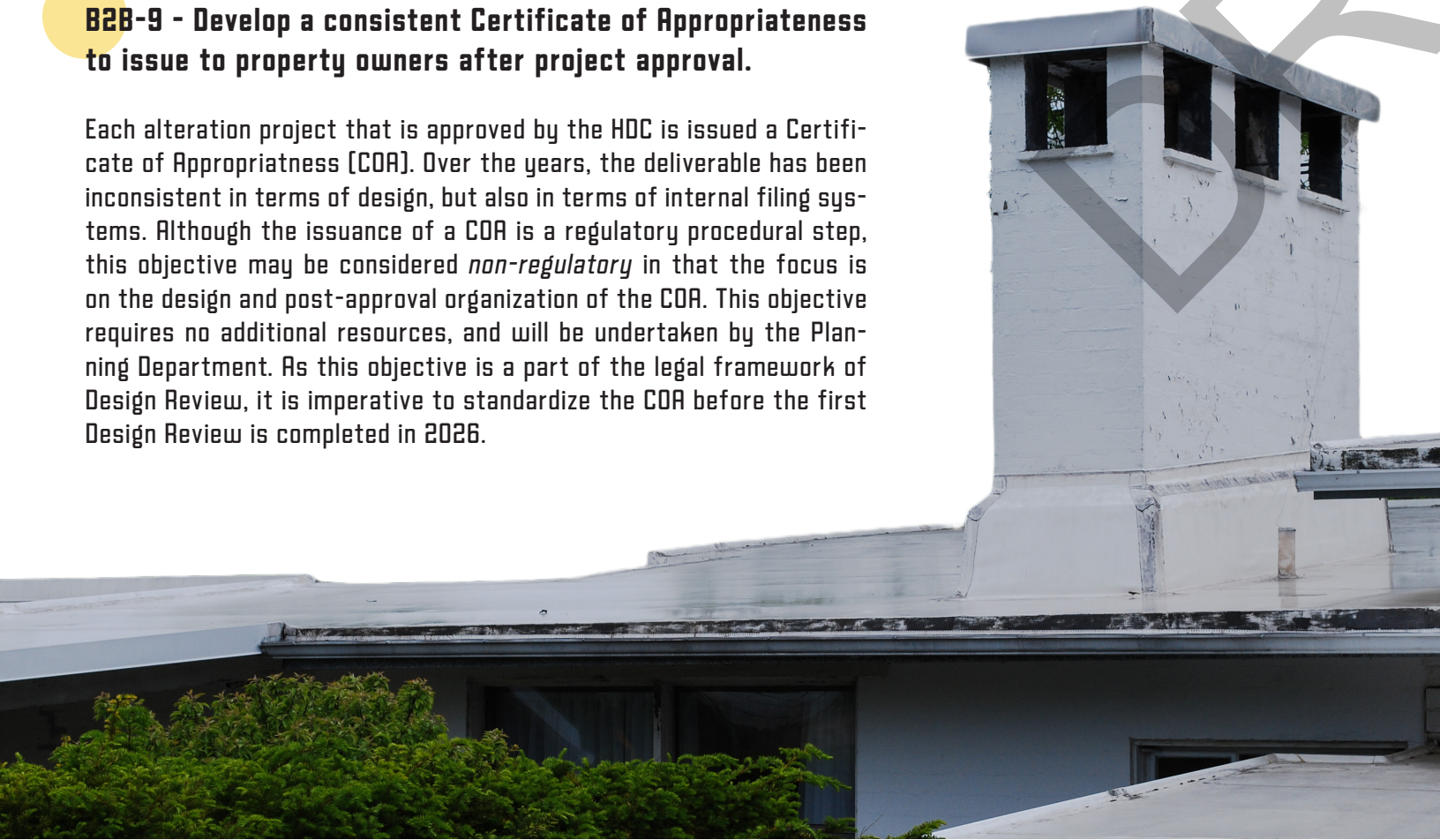
The historic district ordinances of the City of Birmingham state that all plans that include work, such as addition/alteration, to the exterior of a resource and/or its site shall be reviewed by the HDC. The ordinance defines resource as “one or more publicly or privately owned historic or non-historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, features, or open spaces located within a historic district.” Up to this point, the City has done a poor job of regulating buildings or properties within historic districts that are not specifically listed as designated historic resources. As a general rule, all properties within a district have a potential to impact the character and feel of the district, which is why such regulations exist in Birmingham and other communities across the nation. As this objective is again considering the enforcement of existing ordinances, it is considered *regulatory*. This objective will be carried out by the Planning Department and Historic District Commission with the assistance of the Building Department. There are no additional resources required for this objective, as the City already has the tools and systems necessary to complete. For this reason, the objective should be completed in 2026.

B2B-8 - Increase and regularize enforcement of maintenance requirements to ensure that historic materials are not lost to neglect.

The number one issue for historic buildings in Birmingham is maintenance. It is both a tedious task, and sometimes an expensive endeavor. Although our ordinances require the exterior of every resource to be maintained in a workmanlike manner, the City has been unable to keep up with the enforcement of these codes, which has led to significant deterioration of historic material that, in some cases, cannot be repaired. As the City looks to expand its portfolio of historic resources, the task will only become a larger challenge. For this reason, it is imperative to jumpstart this *regulatory* objective in 2026 to ensure that the City can quickly develop a program of enforcement to stem the tide of deterioration of historic materials. Enforcement will be the responsibility of the Building Department and Planning Department.

B2B-9 - Develop a consistent Certificate of Appropriateness to issue to property owners after project approval.

Each alteration project that is approved by the HDC is issued a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). Over the years, the deliverable has been inconsistent in terms of design, but also in terms of internal filing systems. Although the issuance of a COA is a regulatory procedural step, this objective may be considered *non-regulatory* in that the focus is on the design and post-approval organization of the COA. This objective requires no additional resources, and will be undertaken by the Planning Department. As this objective is a part of the legal framework of Design Review, it is imperative to standardize the COA before the first Design Review is completed in 2026.



Embrace Proactivity (PRO)

To transition the City from a reactive approach to historic preservation to a proactive one and meet people where they are.

The City has access to a multitude of resources from data to social networks to several useful tools that can be leveraged to ensure that irreplaceable resources are not lost to neglect, and that new pockets of history in Birmingham can continually be discovered. At times, the community may not know what it has until it is brought to them.

PRO-1 - Engage with realtors, brokers, and other persons engaged in the sale of land and buildings towards the preservation of historic buildings.

This *non-regulatory* objective aims to leverage what could be considered front-line individuals that are heavily involved at critical junctures in a properties lifetime. There are many benefits to engaging with these types of individuals at the time of sale/purchase of a historic property, predominantly regarding the transfer of information during due dilligence periods. At no point after the purchase of a historically designated property should the buyer have questions as to whether or not their new building is historic, it should be communcated early and often and the City should ensure that expectations are clear and acknowledged. The Planning Department will be the main contact point for this objective, but will likely require assistance from the Birmingham Museum and real estate professionals in the area. It is not anticipated that this objective will require monetary resources, but there may be tools required in terms of access to real estate databases or software that could be considered. This objective should be started in 2028 after the City has time to build its capacity and resource base. Ultimately, the City could explore the expansion of this objective to consider other buildings that may be considered historic, but may not be designated at the time.

PRO-2 - Petition for historic designation of all remaining Wallace Frost designed homes in the City.

The City has long acknowledged the importance of local architect Wallace Frost and his architecture in Birmingham. There were 44 buildings in Birmingham known to have been designed by Wallace Frost. At present, there are only 36 remaining. Today, only 3 of the 36 have been historically designated. When it comes to considering places to start in expanding the City's stock of historic resources, protecting the remaining Wallace Frost designed buildings may be considered low hanging fruit. This objective would be considered *regulatory*, as the end result would be listing in the historic district ordinance and requiring that these properties adhere to the regulations within. As outlined in the historic district ordiance, the City Commission and HDSC would be responsible for designating these resources, and would recieve support from the Planning Department and Birmingham Museum. It should be stated that this objective will also heavily involve the owners of these properties. With the coordination required, as well as a strong desire to build support from Wallace Frost property owners, this objective should be started when the environment is right, perhaps in 2029.

PRO-3 - Perform a full reconnaissance level survey of the Little San Francisco neighborhood.

The Little San Francisco neighborhood is the oldest neighborhood in Birmingham. Reconnaissance level surveys are designed as a “first-look” at a neighborhood or broad group of potentially historic resources. The survey would collect and record basic information through a review of existing files and data sources, and form an exterior review of the buildings. This information is then assembled in a final report that outlines the character and history of the area. This report may be used in support of the historic designation of specific buildings or areas in the future should the City and/or neighborhood wish to commence that process. This type of survey can be completed by a combination of the Planning Department, HDC, and HDSC, and is a *non-regulatory* process. The forms that guide these surveys are free and readily available. This objective should be considered in 2028.

PRO-4 - Study the feasibility of preservation overlay zoning districts in the City.

The City's Zoning Ordinance is a *regulatory* tool that is supported by the City's comprehensive plan, in this case the Birmingham Plan 2040. The 2040 Plan and preservation overlay districts have something in common - both contain features that are aimed at protecting the distinctive character of Birminghams neighborhoods. In the case of the 2040 Plan, the character-based reccomendations are aspirational. That is, to be enforceable, they need to be translated into zoning ordinances. As the City moves forward with the Zoning Ordinance update project that is expected to begin in 2026, preservation overlay zoning should be studied for use as a tool for preserving neighborhood character. The timing is right, and resources have already been allocated to the Zoning Ordinance Update project. The Planning Department would be responsible for engaging with the consultant team and community members during the update project.

PRO-5 - Generate a list of ready-made historic preservation projects eligible for Certified Local Government grant funding.

Since becoming a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 2010, the City of Birmingham has only recieved 1 grant award from the program in the amount of \$20,000, which funded the recent Historic District Design Guidelines project. As we understand it, CLG grant funding is readily available on an annual basis, and frequently underutilized. This *non-regulatory* objective would provide for better, more efficient access to a funding program that could jumpstart many of the objectives within this plan, or other projects that the HDC or City Commission feel are worthwhile. The Planning Department, together with the HDC, should procure a list in 2026 in preparation for the 2027 CLG grant cycle.

PRO-6 - Develop a network of historic preservation advocates to support historic preservation efforts in the City.

In the City of Birmingham, we are constantly impressed by the willingness of residents to volunteer their time and experience toward furthering the goals of government. The City has also observed groundswells of public support for the preservation of historic places, unfortunately often at times when it is too late. As a *non-regulatory* objective, the City may explore some creative opportunities and tools to connect like-minded people including social media, constant contact groups, or neighborhood associations. The Planning Department would be responsble for setting up the city-based systems with the assistance of the Communications Department, but much of the network building can also be supported by the HDC, HDSC, and City Commission. Although progress on this objective could start immediately, the full network of preservation advocates may not be completed and ready to mobilize until 2028.



PRO-7 - Coordinate with the Planning Board and City Commission in the implementation of the Birmingham Plan 2040 to ensure that the historic preservation goals of the City are reflected in broader planning.

As noted above, historic preservation planning works best when it is integrated to a communities broader planning and policymaking activities. The master planning activities of the last two years in the City has created a collaborative environment that must be carried through to implementation. Coordination could be improved through leveraging existing tools such as joint meetings, or could be strengthened by developing new communication tools between the three bodies. The Planning Department and City Manager’s office will be responsible for these *non-regulatory* efforts. Although implementation timelines are different for the separate plans, there are several opportunities available through 2027 to achieve this objective with no additonal costs incurred.

PRO-8 - Adopt a demolition delay ordinance.

Demolition delay ordinances are a *regulatory* tool that enables communities to trigger a temporary waiting period before a building is demolished, which gives the HDC, HDSC and/or City Commission time to review and document any potential historical significance as well as explore alternatives to demolition. Although demolition delay ordinances do not guarantee preservation, it at least provides an opportunity to consider preservation or other alternatives before a permit is issued. This objective will require the Planning Department and Building Department to coordinate efforts to develop the language, and may necessitate that the HDSC be authorized to meet to perform the functions of the ordinance. Due to the rate at which building are being demolished, the City should pursue this objective in 2026.



Interested in seeing what a Demolition Delay Ordinance could look like?

- [PITTSFIELD, MARYLAND](#)
- [PAWTUCKET, RHODE ISLAND](#)
- [CHICAGO, ILLINOIS](#)
- [NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS](#)
- [WESTPORT, CONNETICUT](#)

PRO-9 - Incorporate historic preservation values, principles, and processes into municipal policy, facilities planning, and programs at all levels of municipal activity.

This *non-regulatory* objective aims to broaden the reach of historic preservation to all City Departments, Boards, Commissions and Committees to ensure that the goals of this plan can be supported by more than just the Planning Department, HDC, HDSC, and City Commission. It just so happens that Birmingham’s City Hall and the Baldwin Public Library are designated historic resources, which demonstrates a commitment beyond paper, policy and plans. However, there are other considerations to be had in efforts such as strategic planning, budgets, public services and maintenance (to name a few) that could do well to incorporate more historic preservation principles, even at a high level. This responsibility may be borne by the City Managers office with assistance from the Planning Department, and would require little in terms of resources beyond staff time. Due to competing priorities and the effort required, it would be fair to target 2029 for this objective.

PRO-10 - Create a financial incentive program in Birmingham to support historic property owners in the maintenance and upkeep of their historic buildings.

The interest in some sort of financial incentive to support historic property owners in rehabilitation or maintenance project was one of the top issues for residents and property owners in the City. Generally speaking, financial incentives can be broken into two categories: tax breaks and grants. Both would be new concepts in the City, and both provide for their own unique challenges. Although this is a highly sought after objective, it requires a delicate approach and careful policy crafting to ensure fairness and longevity. This objective would be considered *non-regulatory*, and the resources required are uncertain at this time, and highly dependant on the approach. In any event, the City should look to have a program drafted by 2030. The Planning Department would work closely with the Finance Director, City Attorney and City Manager on proposals related to financial incentives.

PRO-11 - Ressurect the City’s Heritage Home Program to recognize builidngs at or older than 100 years of age.

When considering historic preservation programs in the City, it is important to have options. It is true that not all property owners with old or eligible buildings are interested in local historic designation. This is where the Heritage Home program could fit back into the fold. This ressurected, *non-regulatory* program could offer a different starting point for many people, and could act as a stepping stone to full historic designation. In restarting this program, however, the City should make sure to track and collate data much better than the first time around, as the point of this program is to recognize history, which is difficult to do without the tools to do so. Depending on the approach that the City takes in restarting this program, costs incurred could be in the \$200-\$500 range for each new plaque. The Planning Department has managed this program in the past, and assistance could be provided by volunteers on the HDC or HDSC. The program should be developed in 2027 after some other important objectives are complete.



PRO-12 - Develop an annual budget and regular allocation of funds to support general historic preservation activity in the City.

Although historic preservation work in the City is mostly performed by City Staff and volunteers, there are at times projects or activities that may cost money. This can range from the aforementioned trainings in B2B-1 to grant matches and everything in between. Providing the HDC & HDSC with an annual budget, a *non-regulatory* action, would further the City's commitment to historic preservation and allow flexibility when considering projects. The budgetary allotment would not be significant to start, perhaps in the \$5,000-\$10,000 range annually. It is worth noting that these funds would need to be approved by the City Commission in both their potential allocation and expenditure. The funds would likely be managed by the Planning Department as liaisons to both groups, but will be overseen by the City Manager. The Planning Department should make this request in the 2027-2028 budget cycle when more progress is made in this Plan.

PRO-13 - Historically designate 40 additional buildings or properties by 2040 ("40 by 40").

Historic designation is a big deal. Adding 40 additional buildings to the City's existing stock of 82 (a 50% increase) would be an even bigger deal. If this sounds like a tall task, it certainly is. However, 40 new historic properties is only 5% of the homes currently over 100 years old, and is 0.5% of the overall number of buildings in the City. This *regulatory* objective, "40 by 40," is catchy and marketable as a historic preservation tactic, which could encourage property owners who may already be thinking about designation to commit to be a part of this exclusive group of properties. As the City needs all the time it can get to achieve this objective, developing materials and other marketing-type approaches should be started right away in 2026. The Planning Department and Communications Department would be the main drivers of this objective. As City Staff has the graphic design skills necessary to build this program and the volunteer work of the HDSC to administer designations, there would not be any anticipated cost.

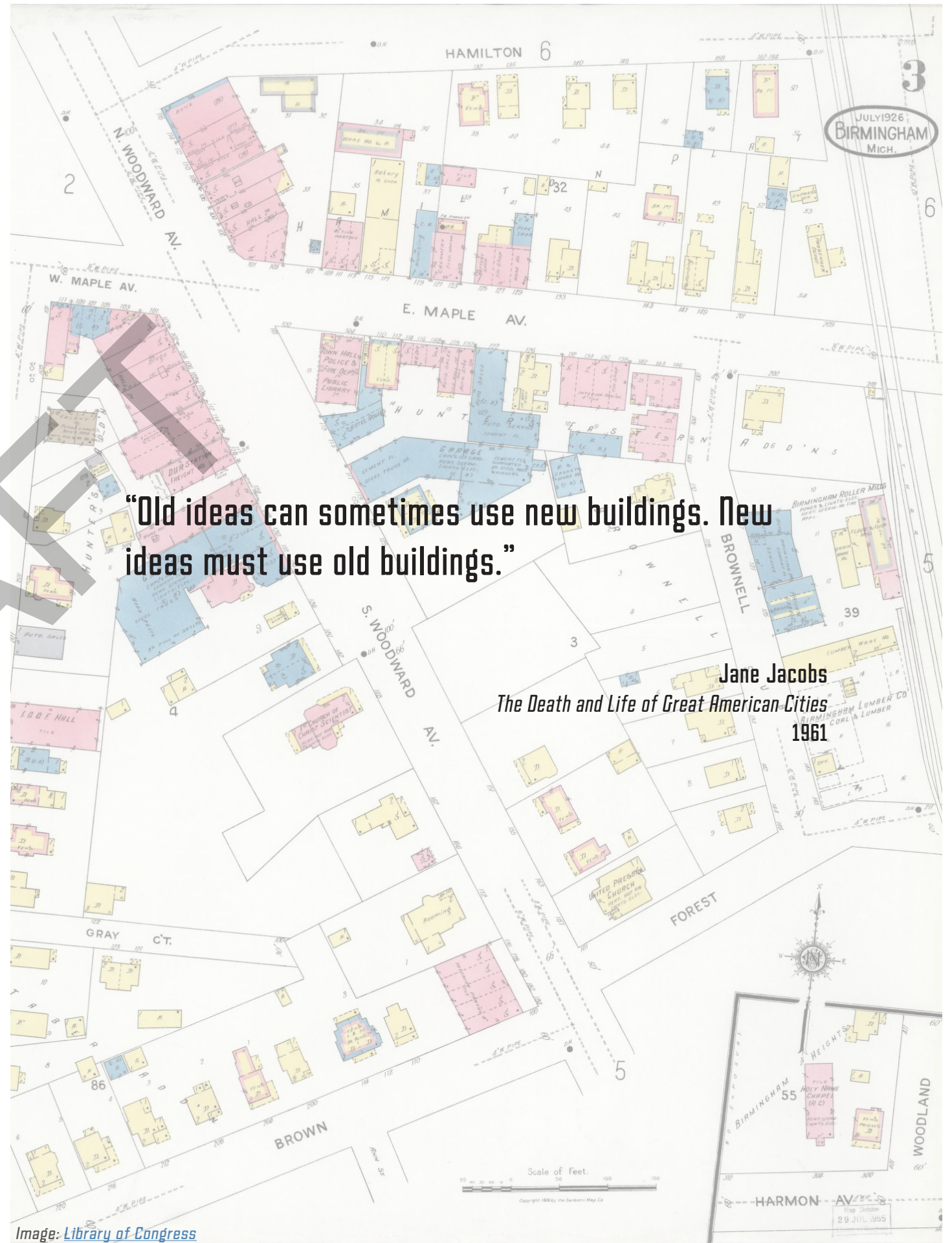


Image: Library of Congress

Inform and Engage (INF)

To boost the profile of historic preservation in Birmingham to a level that unifies public opinion towards historic preservation in the City.

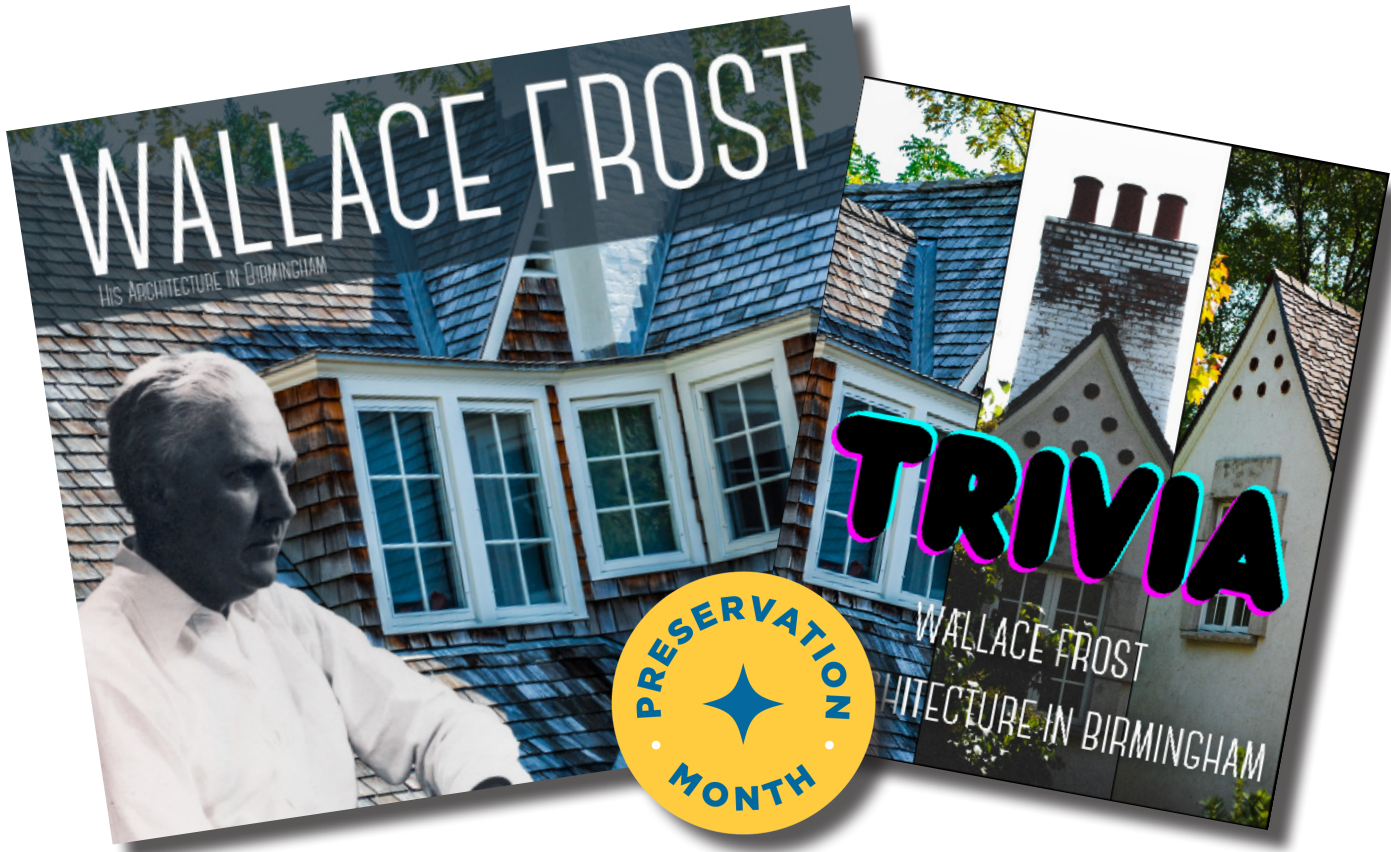
To build continued support for historic preservation in Birmingham, the City must provide the community with the information it needs to understand what it means to preserve and why it is important. Emphasis can be added to robust data and accessibility of information.

INF-1 - Work with the Birmingham Museum to provide current, accurate descriptions of designated historic resources within the City.

The Birmingham Museum is a wealth of information and will continue to be the number one resource for information related to the City's historic properties. In the early 2010's, the Planning Department put together a file for each of the City's designated historic properties as a sort of "quick-reference" for use by the Planning Department. These folders have since become outdated, as are the descriptions within them. The Planning Department uses these descriptions during Design Reviews as well as for the historic plaque program. As this work will take considerable time and effort on the part of the Birmingham Museum, it would be best to give as much time to prepare as possible with a goal of 2028. At this time, there would be no cost in achieving this *non-regulatory* objective. Once completed, the City should make these resources available as a digital resource on the City's website.

INF-2 - Provide unique programming during National Historic Preservation Month every year.

Every year in May, the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) (NTHP) celebrates National Historic Preservation Month. Each year has a special theme, such as "People Saving Places" or "Harnessing the Power of Place." The NTHP provides the theme, free digital marketing kits, and stories to share. This toolkit makes celebrating preservation month that much easier, and that much more interesting. These activities provide for a unique opportunity for the community to showcase a piece of their history and channel some of the energy from the celebration into their preservation programs. In 2025, the City made their first major preservation month push with a celebration of [Wallace Frost](#), which involved themed social media posts, proclamations, newsletters, public engagements, and even a trivia challenge. This *non-regulatory* objective suggests that the City should build on the success of the program and endeavor to provide similar programming on an annual basis. Programming will be led and design by the Planning Department, but will include assistance from the Communications Department and Department of Public Services.



INF-3 - Develop and install historic district signage that is consistent with the wayfinding program for the City.

In 2024, the City adopted a [Wayfinding and Signage Master Plan](#) to provide guidance to Birmingham personnel and outside consultants involved in specifying, fabricating, and installing signs for the City. It is designed to guide the use of the Birmingham design standard and to assure that it is correctly and consistently applied. The design scheme is based on the Freedom of the Human Spirit sculpture located in Shain Park, which is also integrated in the City's logo. In an effort to integrate historic preservation into City branding and wayfinding, the HDC should endeavor to develop complementary wayfinding signage for its historic districts and historic places. This *non-regulatory* objective would require funding from the City Commission, as well as potential design consultation services. The Planning Department and Communications Department spearhead the City's wayfinding program and should continue to do so with the assistance of the Wayfinding and Branding Committee. At this point, it would be best to consider this objective after the City has completed the first phases of the broader wayfinding program in 2029.

INF-4 - Produce updated historic plaques for all designated historic buildings in the Central Business Historic District.

Recently, the City has noticed that the majority of the existing commercial historic plaques have begun to deteriorate. The existing plaques, which were the first of their kind, were constructed of porcelain enameled steel and mounted to a bracket. The initial plaques were placed as a part of a voluntary, *non-regulatory* program, which the City would look to continue. The City was recently given an opportunity to replace two plaques downtown after one was stolen and the other removed for construction. At that point, it was clear that the existing style would be very hard to recreate, and at a cost of nearly \$600 a sign, the effort would be cost prohibitive. Thus, the City purchased two plaques to use as a pilot for a new program. These plaques are constructed of acrylic with applied vinyl, and are attached to the building on standoffs. At around \$200 a plaque, they are much more cost-effective, and have a much cleaner aesthetic. The Planning Department will manage this program with content help from the Birmingham Museum, and currently has an annual budget of \$1,000 to purchase historic plaques. As a single years budget will not be sufficient to replace all of the existing plaques, the City should begin in 2026 by taking an inventory of all remaining plaques and create a replacement program that prioritizes the most damaged plaques.

INF-5 - Create more opportunities for the City to interact with property owners of historic resources.

It is unfortunate that often the only time the City and historic property owners interact is during the Design Review process, which can sometimes be stressful and can create an adversarial relationship that deepens misconceptions about historic designations. In engaging historic property owners during this planning process, it became clear that these property owners have so much more to offer in experience and perspective that the City would be wise to leverage. The Planning Department is well suited to create these opportunities, and will surely benefit from including the HDC and HDSC at times. The City should look to spend time developing these opportunities and explore different options to ascertain what might be most beneficial for both parties. 2028 would be a realistic timeframe to complete this *non-regulatory* objective.



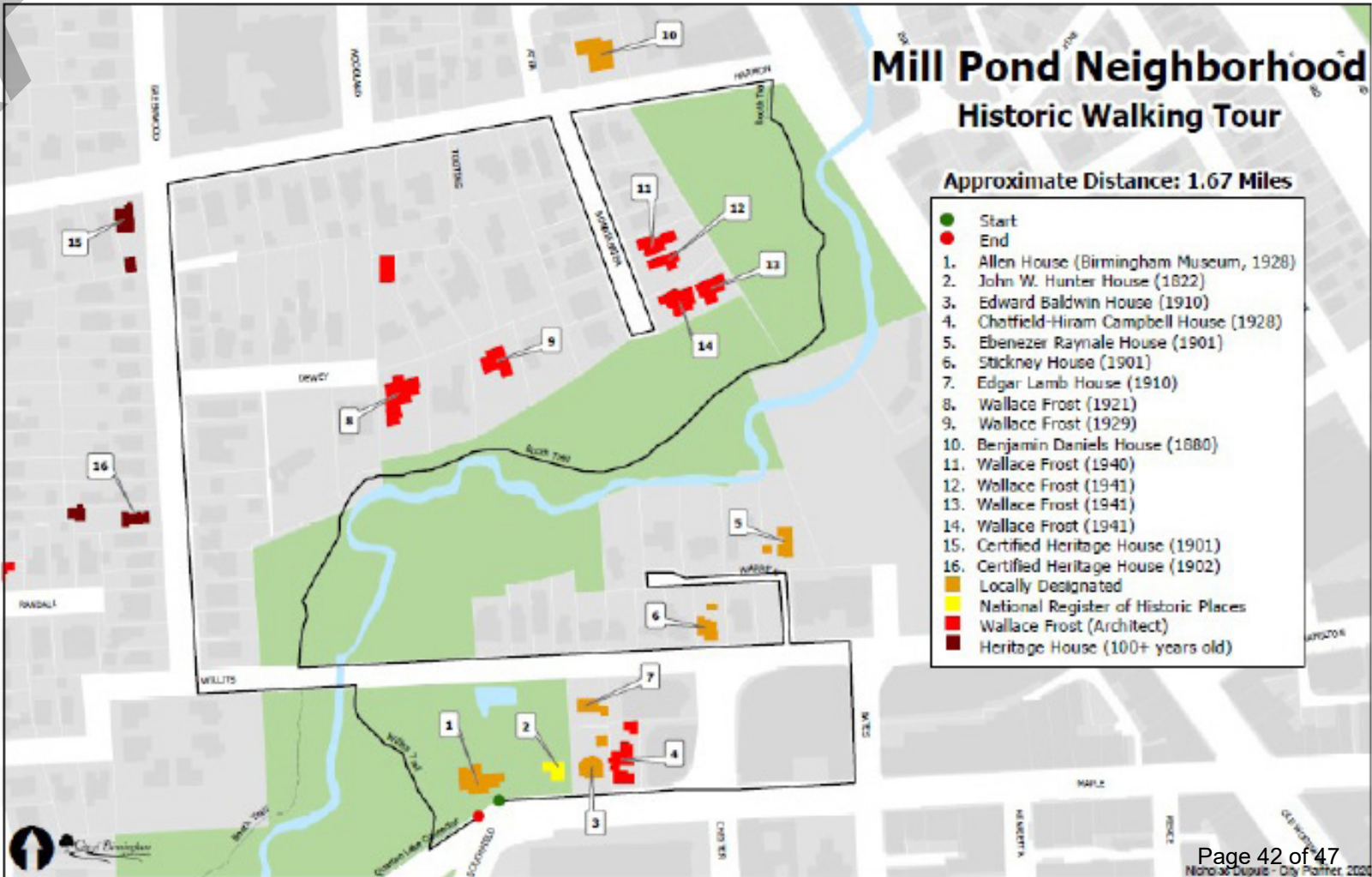
Did you know that the artist that created the Freedom of the Human Spirit (the inspiration for Birmingham's logo and branding), Marshall Fredericks, lived in a Wallace Frost designed house on Lake Park?

INF-6 - Establish an annual Preservation/Conservation Awards Program to highlight and celebrate preservation and conservation initiatives and achievements by residents and entities in Birmingham.

With the high levels of complexity and creativity required for rehabilitation projects in the City, it could be beneficial to recognize projects that rise to the top in terms of approach, execution and results. The HDC would need to develop criterion, plan an awards ceremony, and determine how these projects would be recognized. Awards programs are *non-regulatory*, and exist to build energy and draw attention to preservation in the City. Developing the program would not require funding, however the procurement of any physical award would likely require funds to be budgeted and planned for annually. Most of these responsibilities will be borne by the Planning Department, and should not be considered until the City's preservation program is a little more built out. This program could start in 2030 and used to usher in a new era of historic preservation in the City.

INF-7 - Develop historic tours as a part of the Birmingham Shopping Districts tourism initiatives.

Walking tours are a simple, low cost opportunity that provides the public with what might be considered the best way to experience a historic property - live and in living color! This *non-regulatory* objective recognizes that there have been several historic walking tours developed by both the Planning Department and the Birmingham Museum over the years, but they have not been coordinated up to this point. With the [Birmingham Shopping District's](#) (BSD) recent tourism initiatives, the environment is ripe to collaborate on walking tours that can be hosted on the BSD's updated, state of the art webpage. The Planning Department and Birmingham Museum should collaborate to create walking tours of historic districts, but also historic neighborhoods and other historic places that may not be designated at the time. This plan suggests developing basic tours by 2028, and building on successes as time goes on.



INF-8 - Through city staff, provide technical support to the owners of historic properties on the Michigan State Historic Tax Credit program.

An added benefit of any communities historic preservation program would be to provide technical support to its historic property owners when seeking state historic tax credits. Having recently been resurrected in 2020, these tax credits became available to properties that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register of Historic Sites, or be in a local historic district, and either be individually listed or contribute to a listed district in order to be eligible for the State Credit. Although the City does not currently have experience working with tax credit projects, providing the opportunity for city staff to become well-versed in the process could provide a unique and lucrative public service to Birmingham residents and property owners. Non-profits and other advocacy groups are regularly lobbying to increase the funding for these tax credits, which are often quickly exhausted. Technical support services are a *non-regulatory* approach to historic preservation, although the application process itself and the eligibility requirements for tax credits can feel like they are regulatory at times. The Planning Department would be the best fit to provide these services, but may consult with the Finance Director at times to better understand the financial side of the issue. As the City continues to monitor the status of the State tax credits, it should consider 2030 as a reasonable goal to have something in place.

INF-9 - Provide regular historic preservation related content in the City’s newsletters.

The City’s [Around Town E-Newsletter](#) and [Birmingham Beat](#) printed newsletter are valuable engagement tools that have a strong presence, high quality design, and high interaction rates. The Planning Department uses these newsletters to discuss historic preservation issues in a more candid, casual manner that is often a much needed respite from the technical side of historic preservation. This non-regulatory objective can continue in 2026 and through the lifespan of this plan. These newsletter articles are written by the Planning Department and formatted by the Communications Department.



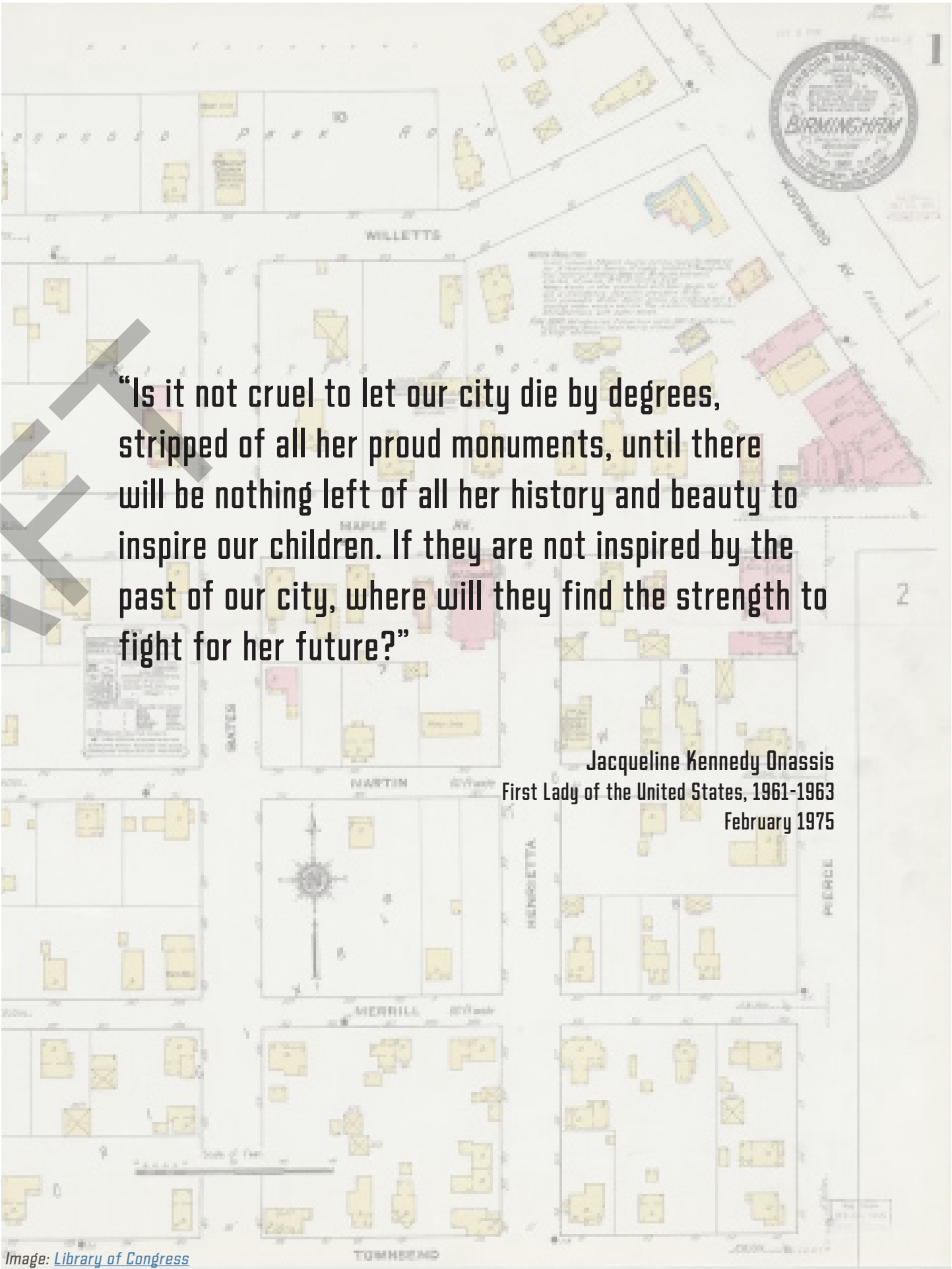
INF-10 - Together with the Birmingham Museum, develop or expand historic context statements for each of the City’s historic resources.

The context in which a property, building, or place is historic is an important part of understanding its significance and why it is worth saving. These historic context statements can also explain how each resource may fit in with others in the City, and for what reasons. Creating these statements, a *non-regulatory* objective, can help make historic preservation a little more approachable and relatable to many different people. Developing these statements would be of no cost, and would be completed by the Planning Department and Birmingham Museum. These types of actions could be started in 2028 when the initial objectives are complete or well underway.



Interested in signing up to receive City newsletters and other communications?

[BIRMINGHAM COMMUNICATION RESOURCES](#)



“Is it not cruel to let our city die by degrees, stripped of all her proud monuments, until there will be nothing left of all her history and beauty to inspire our children. If they are not inspired by the past of our city, where will they find the strength to fight for her future?”

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis
First Lady of the United States, 1961-1963
February 1975

CONCLUSION

A Call to Action

Historical preservation preserves character, roots, and stories that span generations. Birmingham’s stock of historic places is special. It ranges from 3 nationally registered historic sites (and counting), to over 80 locally designated resources, to an abundance of eligible buildings anxious to be discovered. With Birmingham’s walkable and inviting community, it is uniquely possible to have intimate interactions everyday with the City’s rich past.

As a general rule - every old building is special, complete with its own identity and its own distinctive character, its own experiences, and its own personality. In Birmingham, that comes in many different shapes, sizes, materials, craftsmanship, and decorative details. What is worth preserving? Why is it important? This plan submits that every building deserves a chance to be considered for its historical value no matter its age, prominence, or disposition.

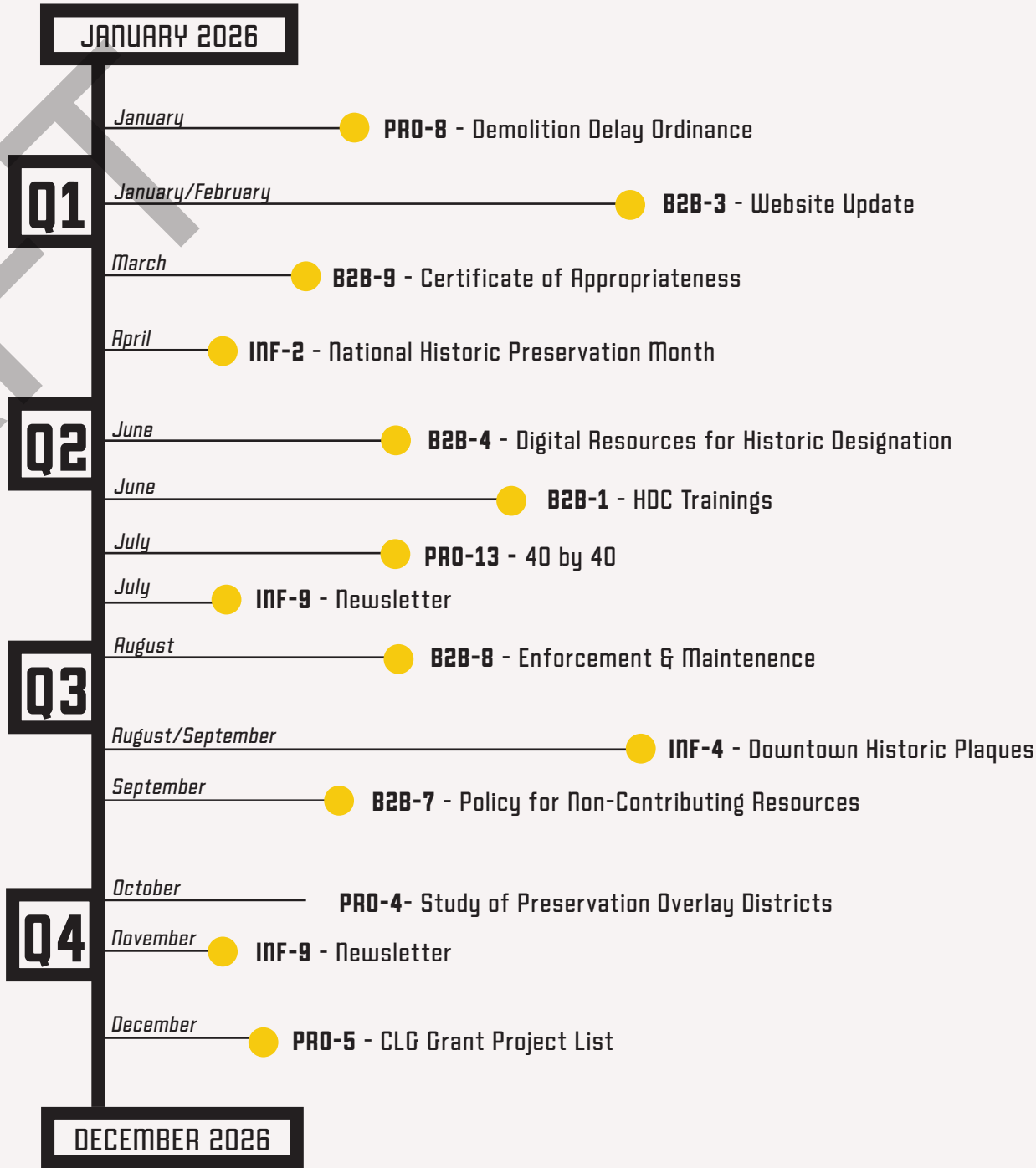
Successful historic preservation practice requires the Birmingham community to coalesce and support the historic preservation projects and policies that are envisioned in this plan to protect historic places from demolition and neglect, because **ONCE IT IS GONE - IT IS GONE FOREVER**. As we look to the future, success can start with a conversation, a short walk, a unique experience, or a new idea.

In closing, this plan offers much in terms of opportunity to gain (or rather retain) something that is purposeful, meaningful, and accessible. Moreover, the spillover effects are undeniable. Historic preservation is positively correlated with sustainability and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Economically, historic preservation can have positive impacts in boosting property value, creating jobs, and driving tourism. For the community, historic preservation provides a sense of identity and civic pride while also fostering connections to the past. It is our hope that this plan drives you to ask questions, talk to your neighbors, and think about historic preservation in a different way.



First Steps

Achieving the goals of this plan will require a strategy that balances time, resources, and scope to produce a high quality product that can stand the test of time. As such, the Action Plan set timing goals for each objective to help the implementors of this plan stay tight to task. The following graphic summarizes the suggested order of operations for the first year of implementation:



GLOSSARY

Key Terms & Acronyms

The following terms and acronyms were collated from various historic preservation sources including the National Park Service, Michigan Historic Preservation Network, and National Alliance of Preservation Commissions.

- **Certificate of Appropriateness** - Written approval of a permit application for work in a local historic district by the Historic District Commission, indicating that the work is appropriate and does not adversely affect a resource.
- **Contributing Resource** - A building, structure, object, or site adding to the significance of a historic district.
- **Design Guidelines** - Standards of appropriate activity to preserve the historic and architectural character of a building, structure, object, or site.
- **Historic Context**- A unit created for planning purposes that groups information about historic properties based on a shared theme, specific time period and geographical area.
- **Historic District Commission (HDC)** - A local governmental board responsible for overseeing design review for locally designated districts in Michigan.
- **Historic District Study Committee (HDSC)** - A committee appointed by a local government in Michigan to survey a potential historic district and prepare a recommendation report for review and consideration.
- **Historic District Ordinance** - Local law enacted under Michigan PA 169 of 1970 to allow a local unit of government to establish and administer local historic districts, including establishment of a HDC.
- **Historic Preservation** - The process of identifying, protecting, enhancing, and interpreting buildings, structures, sites, objects, districts, and landscapes of historic and cultural significance.
- **Historic Property** - A district, site, building, structure or object significant in American history, architecture, engineering, archeology or culture at the national, State, or local level.
- **Historic Resource** - Any prehistoric or historic building, structure, object, or site included in or eligible for a historic register.
- **Integrity** - The authenticity of a property's historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property's historic or prehistoric period.
- **Intensive Survey** - A systematic, detailed examination of an area designed to gather information about historic properties sufficient to evaluate them against predetermined criteria of significance within specific historic contexts.
- **Inventory** - A list of historic properties determined to meet specified criteria of significance.

- **Local Historic District** - An area, or group of areas, not necessarily having contiguous boundaries, that contains one resource or a group of resources that are related by history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture designated by the local unit of government.
- **Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN)** - A statewide non-profit historic preservation membership organization "advocating for Michigan's historic places to contribute to the economic vitality, sense of place, and connection to the past."
- **Michigan Historical Commission (MHC)** - State commission advising the Department of Natural Resources on historical artifacts and materials and on the dissemination of information on Michigan's history including the historical marker program.
- **Michigan Historical Marker Program** - Historic sites, events, objects, subjects, and persons having historic significance to the state of Michigan marked at a significant location by signage erected under authority of the Michigan Historical Commission [PA 10 of 1955].
- **Michigan State Registier of Historic Sites** - The list of historic sites, events, objects, subjects, and persons having historic significance to the state of Michigan marked at a significant location through the Michigan Historical Marker Program [PA 10 of 1955].
- **National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC)** - A national non-profit membership organization supporting local historic preservation commissions.
- **National Historic Landmark (NHL)** - A district, building, structure, site, or object of national significance, designated by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for possessing exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.
- **National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)** - A federal law that fosters the identification, evaluation, and protection of historic and prehistoric resources in the United States enacted in 1966.
- **National Parks Service (NPS)** - A federal agency within the Department of the Interior that works to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations



GLOSSARY CONTINUED...

- **National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)** - The Official list of the nation's historic places worthy of preservation.
- **National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP)** - National non-profit membership organization that “protects significant places representing the nation's diverse cultural heritage.”
- **Non-Contributing Resource** - A building, structure, object, or site that does not add to the significance of a historic district.
- **Preservation [Treatment]** - Preservation is defined as the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction.
- **Public Act 169 of 1970, as Amended (PA 169)** - Michigan law, also known as Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act, that provides a legal foundation for the creation and administration of local historic districts.
- **Reconnaissance Survey** - An examination of all or part of an area accomplished in sufficient detail to make generalizations about the types and distributions of historic properties that may be present.
- **Reconstruction [Treatment]** - Reconstruction is defined as the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.
- **Rehabilitation [Treatment]**- Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.
- **Restoration [Treatment]** - Restoration is defined as the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period.
- **Secretary of the Interior's Standards (SOI Standards)** - Typically refers to the Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties—Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, & Reconstruction. However, Standards are also available for Preservation Planning, Identification, Evaluation, Registration, Qualification, and Historical, Archaeological, Architectural, and Engineering Documentation.
- **State Historic Preservation Office** - Established by the NHPA, the agency in each state or territory that administers the national historic preservation program. The Officer is appointed by the Governor to oversee its functions.

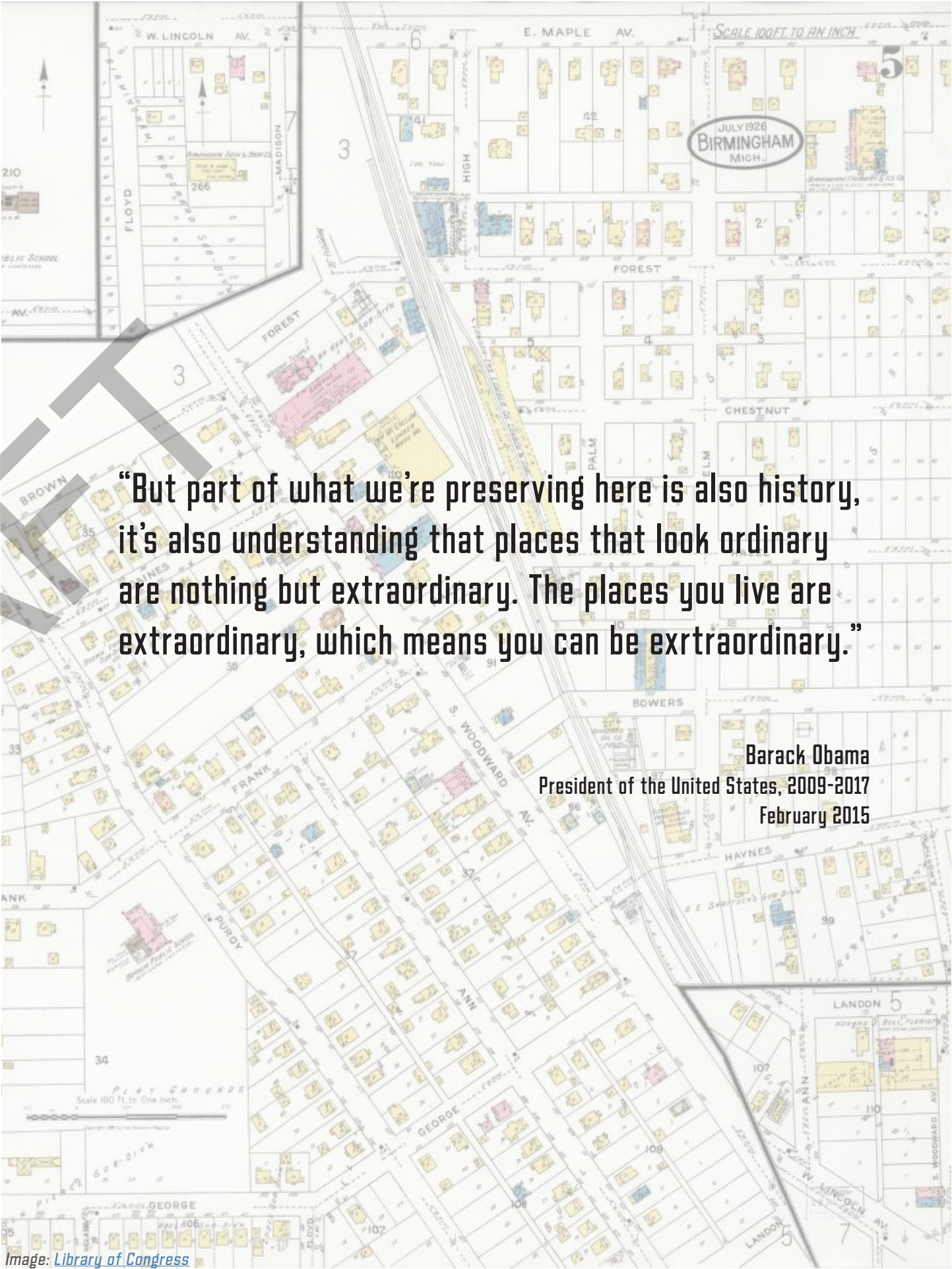


Image: [Library of Congress](#)

APPENDIX

Facade Condition Assessments

As a part of this planning process, the Planning Department and the Historic District Commission performed facade condition assessments of the existing inventory of historic places in the City. These assessments were structured using information from the [Michigan Above Ground Survey Manual](#) and contain observatons about the condition, alteration, or other details related to the property.

Due to the size of the document, the completed facade condition assessments are being hosted on the City's web-site, and may be reviewed through the following link:

2025 FACADE CONDITION ASSESSMENTS

Helpful Links

- [City of Birmingham, Michigan Website](#)
- [Birmingham Historic District Design Guidelines](#)
- [Birmingham Code of Ordinances, Chapter 127 - Historic Districts](#)
- [Birmingham Historic District Commission](#)
- [Birmingham Historic District Study Committee](#)
- [Birmingham City Commission](#)
- [Michigan State Historic Preservation Office Website](#)
- [Michigan Historic Preservation Network Website](#)
- [National Parks Service Website](#)
- [Michigan Historical Commission Website](#)
- [Library of Congress - Sanborn Maps](#)
- [National Trust for Historic Preservation Website](#)
- [National Alliance of Preservation Commissions](#)
- [Birmingham Shopping District Website](#)
- [United States Department of the Interior](#)
- Video - Historic District Recommendation for HPMP to City Commission [December 1, 2025]
- Video - City Commission Adoption of HPMP [January 5, 2026]

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