

VII. Historic Preservation Program

Chapter VII

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

BACKGROUND

During these times of extremely rapid growth, Anchorage has seen drastic changes in the physical environment in which people live. As the wholesale transformation of our familiar landscape accelerates, there is a real danger that all meaningful evidence of past deeds and ways of life -- those which provide the context for our present and future accomplishments -- will be obliterated.

Faced with this threat, more and more residents recognize the urgent need for retaining, within a framework of change, those places and neighborhoods which testify to the historical processes that produced us and our contemporary situation. Only decisive action by local government and citizens can insure that Anchorage's historic character will not be destroyed by unregulated change.

During the public participation meeting series, historic preservation was among the major concerns of the citizens of downtown Anchorage (see Chapter II). Previous chapters have dealt extensively with ways in which historic preservation can be incorporated into downtown planning. For example:

- In Chapter I, discussions pertaining to the disposition of future development plans in various downtown development districts indicated a recommenced emphasis on historic

preservation and compatible infill development in the historic 4th Avenue retail area.

- In discussion of the need for additional open space and parks in downtown Anchorage, it was recommended that historic preservation be used as a major theme in publicly accessible spaces in downtown Anchorage.

HISTORIC USE COMPLEMENTS HISTORIC PRESERVATION

From a historic perspective, three patterns of land use stand out in the Original Townsite: commercial, government and residential uses. These are important in maintaining a varied and lively district where shoppers, employees and residents support the vitality of downtown. To a substantial degree, the preservation of historic buildings serves in realizing such functional objectives, especially the reuse of buildings for commercial purposes. The scale of many historic buildings is small, yet their use and relationship to the fabric of downtown architecture is intriguing and offers pedestrians ground level shopping, office, eating and entertainment functions which are significant in the CBD's vitality. Beyond historic buildings, new development should reflect these ingredients of balanced city life -- commerce, government and housing. These objectives should be incorporated in preserving the old and building the new. Expanses of vacant land and parking lots undermine the liveliness of downtown. Multiuse in development and preservation should be sought in complementing the traditional balance of downtown land use. Specific areas within the downtown commercial core, especially along 4th Avenue and at the edges of the CBD, have much to offer in

integrating the old and new and in preserving traditional land use patterns.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

The Municipality of Anchorage has appropriated \$4.65 million to be applied to the "Railroad Town" historic preservation program, one of the Project 80's capital improvement programs. Of this amount, approximately \$3.65 million remains.

Other financial means through which preservation can be carried out include: federal income tax credits and deductions, the State's Historic District Revolving Loan Fund, and various federal grant programs. The funding level of the grant and loan programs can vary considerably from year to year.

CURRENT DIRECTION

Preservation success in the past few years has been on a building-by-building basis. These include such public rehabilitation and reuse projects as Old City Hall, Pioneer School, the Oscar Anderson House, and the Old Federal Building.

Additionally, more than ten houses have been donated to the Municipality which would otherwise have been demolished. The private sector has also been instrumental in preservation efforts; prominent examples include the restoration of the Leopold David House and the reuse of A.E.C. Cottages. As this document moves toward adoption, two significant building -- the Wendler and

Lathrop Buildings -- are being addressed as major preservation projects.

Although there has been some success in historic preservation, there is a grave need for an overall preservation program and plan. In order to address this need, the following are being done.

- The Heritage Resources Corporation -- a tax exempt, nonprofit entity -- has been created to administer preservation monies and implement specific preservation projects.
- A historic preservation ordinance to provide a process for nominating, designating, and regulating landmark sites, structures, and districts has been drafted. Integral to the ordinance are economic incentives for owners of historic properties.
- A downtown historic preservation plan is being prepared. It will include an updated inventory of historic resources, priorities, alternatives to carry out preservation in the downtown area and recommendations, including the use of Railroad Town funds, to implement the plan.

Following review and adoption of the historic preservation master plan, that document will become part of this CBD Comprehensive Development Plan.

