



PRESERVATION COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT **2024**

To: Members of the Planning & Development Committee
From: Members of the Preservation Commission
CC: Cade W. Sterling, Preservation Planner
Subject: Preservation Commission Annual Report
Date: September 30, 2025 (Adopted on July 15, 2025)

Structure

1. What is the composition of the Commission?

The current membership of the Commission represents 7 of 9 wards and includes architects, preservationists, an architectural historian, a realtor, a buildings archaeologist, a landscape steward, designer and contractor, and landmark owners. The Commission currently consists of 10 members and may include up to 11 members appointed by the Mayor with the advice and consent of the City Council. These members must have a demonstrated interest, knowledge, or expertise and experience in historic preservation, architectural restoration and rehabilitation, or neighborhood revitalization or conservation. Members are appointed to up to two three-year terms.

2. How many vacancies exist, and are pending vacancies imminent?

The Commission currently has no vacancies. A Commissioner's second term ends in November which will result in 1 vacancy. Residents have applied and additional residents are on a wait list to receive notification of the pending vacancy.

3. How many meetings are required per year?

The Commission has adopted a schedule of 11 regular monthly meetings with an August recess. It may also schedule additional special meetings and working group and subcommittee meetings as needed.

4. How many meetings were held in the past year?

The Commission held 10 regularly scheduled meetings and 2 special meetings in 2024 with cancellations in August (regularly scheduled recess) and March (due to lack of agenda items).

5. Does the Commission achieve its administrative work through staff support? If yes, please list names and positions:

Yes, the Commission operated in 2024 with one primary staff liaison: Cade W. Sterling, City Planner. Meetings are coordinated and attended by the staff liaison who acts informally in a secretarial role.

6. What was the Commission's budget for the past year? How does the budget impact the Commission's operations?

The Commission has operated without a budget for over three decades after its annual education and advocacy budget of ~\$30,000 was discontinued in the late 1980s. The lack of a budget impacts the Commission's ability to fully realize its education and advocacy goals and objectives. Reinstating an annual budget would allow the Commission to work more effectively and strategically toward two interrelated objectives: 1) leveraging preservation to help advance the City's affordability, sustainability, and economic development goals and 2) engaging with the general public to identify and support identification of diverse community resources.

7. How is citizen input encouraged and sought?

The Commission started a quarterly e-newsletter and speaker series in 2023 that continued into 2024 and actively encourages citizen input and education. Citizen input is also encouraged via mailed notifications and posted agendas. Citizen input is primarily received by way of written comments or in-person testimony, with public comment offered at the start of each meeting and at each public hearing for cases requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Goals, Objectives and Accomplishments

1. What is the Commission's mandate?

The Commission is broadly charged with oversight and facilitation of the City's preservation program and is mandated to identify, register, and safeguard the community's historic cultural, architectural, and archaeological heritage. The Commission is afforded nine statements of purpose and thirty powers and duties. These powers and duties include binding design review as well as advisory review and consultation authority.

2. How many properties does the Commission have purview over?

The city has over 850 registered local landmarks of which over half are individual landmarks outside of a registered local historic district. Additionally, the City has four local historic districts: the Lakeshore Historic District, the Ridge Historic District, the Northeast Historic District, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union Historic District. Between local landmarks and properties within local historic districts, the Commission has oversight of just under 10% of properties within the City.

In addition to these, the preservation program provides advisory review and assistance upon request to properties within the federal-only portion of the Northeast Historic District and the Federal Oakton Historic District. The Commission also provides Section 106 and 707 review and comment in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and facilitates other responsibilities delegated to the Commission by the State through the Certified Local Government Program.

No new nominations or designations occurred in 2024. Six properties were identified as eligible for the National Register by the State as part of either a Section 106 or Section 707 process. These properties have since been listed as eligible for local designation. These include:

1. **1999 Campus Drive** (1972) - Norris University Center.
 - i. Edward Dart of Loebel Schlossmann, Bennet & Dart Criterion 3; 4; 9
 2. **1970 Campus Drive** (1971) - University Library.
 - i. Walter Netsch of Skidmore Owings & Merrill | Criterion 3, 5, 9
 3. **50 Arts Circle Drive** (1975)
 - i. Edward Dart of Loebel Schlossmann, Dart & Hackl | Criterion 3, 5, 9
 4. **60 Arts Circle Drive** (1977)
 - i. Walter Netsch of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill | Criterion 3, 4, 9
 5. **860 Hinman Avenue** Evanshire Hotel (1923)
 - i. John August Nyden | Criterion 3, 4, 9
 6. **Fleetwood Jourdain Community Center** (1956)
 - i. Perkins & Will | Criterion 3, 5, 9
3. What were the Commission's objectives for achieving their mandate and advancing initiatives within the City's adopted preservation plan, Preserve 2040, this past year?

The Commission had the following primary objectives outlined in the 2024 Annual Work Plan:

- **Initiative 3.6: Advocate for adoption of a citywide deconstruction ordinance.**

The Commission heard two presentations on the value of deconstruction over demolition, implementation of a deconstruction ordinance, and an overview of deconstruction ordinances across the country. A member of the Commission also engaged in discussions with the Environment Board and Sustainability Division.
- **Initiative 4.4: Prepare a preservation training publication and facilitate one-on-one training for elected officials and heads of city departments.**

The Commission and City staff prepared a training publication that continues to be used for new Commissioner orientation.

- **Initiative 4.12: Prepare an annual training and certification program for local realtors and financial and insurance professionals.**

A realtor on the Commission engaged with local realtors to assess the effectiveness of a preservation training and certification program. While training remains important, the structure of the governing body for Evanston's realtors deems implementation of a certification program more complex than anticipated, and feedback suggests it may not be necessary. As a result of this engagement, however, consultations between the Commission, City staff, and local realtors have increased. Many realtors now engage early with the City when listing a property that is designated as a landmark or within a historic district. This early consultation addressed common misperceptions of the program and helped potential buyers and contract purchasers feel confident in their purchase and ability to improve their homes in the future. In several other circumstances, Commissioners and City staff have engaged with realtors to highlight a property's historical significance, helping them market it more effectively and contributing to stronger preservation outcomes. A specific instance is the Pure Oil gas station on Central Street, which was marketed not as a development opportunity, but for the property's unique history and potential for adaptive use. The property was purchased and is in the process of being adapted and restored.

- **Initiative 2.10: Initiate a Preservation Consortium or Preservation Advisory Sub-Committee (this can include a closer look at associate membership).**

Significant progress was made in the past year to ensure this program was actionable in accordance with the ordinance. Draft changes were suggested for the Commission's rules and procedures to facilitate this program.

The Commission successfully launched a new Cultural Heritage Awards program in 2024, seeking to celebrate and honor a broader definition of cultural heritage and those working within that space to Evanston's benefit. Much of the Commission's time during the 2024 calendar year involved reviewing the proposed comprehensive plan and zoning code. The Commission is charged by ordinance with assessing the appropriateness of these documents for the protection and continued use of existing and eligible landmarks and properties, structures, sites, or objects within historic districts as well as their potential to influence, either positively or negatively, other historically, culturally, architecturally, or archaeologically significant areas, sites, structures, and objects throughout the City. The Commission held multiple hearings on the comprehensive plan in 2024, forming two sets of recommendations for consideration by City staff and the Land Use Commission. Additionally, the Commission reviewed the draft zoning code during three meetings, with particular concern for how the early draft would impact the City's neighborhood business districts, traditional zones within the downtown, and the portion of the Chicago Avenue Corridor directly abutting the Lakeshore Historic District.

While reviewing the comprehensive plan, the Commission emphasized the intersectionality of historic preservation including its ability to help Evanston mutually achieve our shared climate resilience, economic development, housing, land use, and cultural heritage goals.

4. What are the Commission's current objectives for the upcoming year?

1. **Survey and Documentation Efforts**

The Commission is required to maintain an ongoing system of survey and documentation in accordance with Evanston's status as a State of Illinois Certified Local Government. The Commission has prioritized the following for the 2025 year:

- i. **Initiative 1.4:** Conduct a city-wide survey of Evanston's neighborhood business district resources.
 - ii. **Initiative 1.7:** Document and include the built resources that embody historic, social, and cultural periods and events, and the diverse groups and people who have contributed to Evanston's unique character and identity.
 - iii. **Initiative 1.11:** Add eligible resources identified through survey efforts to the ongoing study list of eligible resources. This initiative should include outreach efforts with owners of properties determined eligible for landmark designation. Eligible properties already within historic districts will be prioritized as they are already governed by the preservation ordinance and future designation would provide recognition and celebration without additional regulation.
2. **Initiative 2.10:** Organize a Preservation Consortium or Preservation Advisory Sub-Committee. (*initiated in the 2024 work plan but not started*)
- i. The Commission plans to continue progress on this initiative. A recent survey identified 13 residents interested in participating in a future program. The purpose of this initiative is to create additional capacity and invite more community members into the work of preserving and celebrating our city's rich and diverse cultural heritage. The program would offer training, meaningful volunteer roles, and flexible ways to get involved for residents unable or unwilling to commit to serving as a Commissioner.
3. **Initiative 3.6:** Advocate for adoption of a citywide deconstruction ordinance. (*identified in the 2024 work plan and progress made*)
- i. Ultimately, the Commission requested that language to enact a deconstruction ordinance be included in the comprehensive plan. The Commission will continue to advocate for the adoption of such an ordinance and, given the overlap between historic preservation and construction, would like to be seen as a partner in future implementation efforts. Evanston's historic districts may be a logical starting place for such a program.
4. **Initiative 4.4:** Prepare a preservation training publication and one-on-one orientation for elected officials.
- i. Based on feedback, this training has been split into three 20 minute modules. The first of these three modules was prepared and tested at a recent Commission meeting; the final two are in the process of being

finalized. Once these are completed, the Commission would like to engage members of the City Council to complete this training.

The Commission recognizes the need to correct misperceptions of preservation, especially where they are rooted in incomplete information and a flawed understanding of its role. As part of this initiative, City staff is preparing a series of communications to address and correct common misperceptions.

Evaluation

1. **How are the Commission's objectives and annual activities selected?**

Annual objectives and activities are selected by way of an Annual Work Plan, which is discussed and decided via a roll call vote during the Commission's public meeting in January. The Annual Work Plan is based on the implementation matrix, implementation timeline, and priority levels outlined in *Preserve 2040*.

2. **How often does the Commission evaluate its goals and performance?**

Annually in January.

3. **What is the Commission's evaluation of its performance in the following areas?**

- a. The appropriateness of its purpose and mandate:** The Commission has an appropriate purpose, mandate, and powers and duties. Per the Ordinance, the Commission has worked diligently to expand its role beyond resource management and case review. The Commission also continues to expand its capacity and strengthen relationships with partner organizations in order to more effectively advance the diversity of historic preservation and the Commission's responsibilities within the Ordinance.
- b. Community needs to be filled by the Commission:** Many needs of the community relate to historic preservation. The Commission has made significant strides in utilizing and advocating for historic preservation as an intersectional tool to achieve the community's climate resilience and sustainability goals, remove barriers to the adaptive use of historic resources to meet housing and land use goals, and advance human-centered and preservation-based economic development efforts that capitalize on Evanston's unique identity and rich cultural heritage.

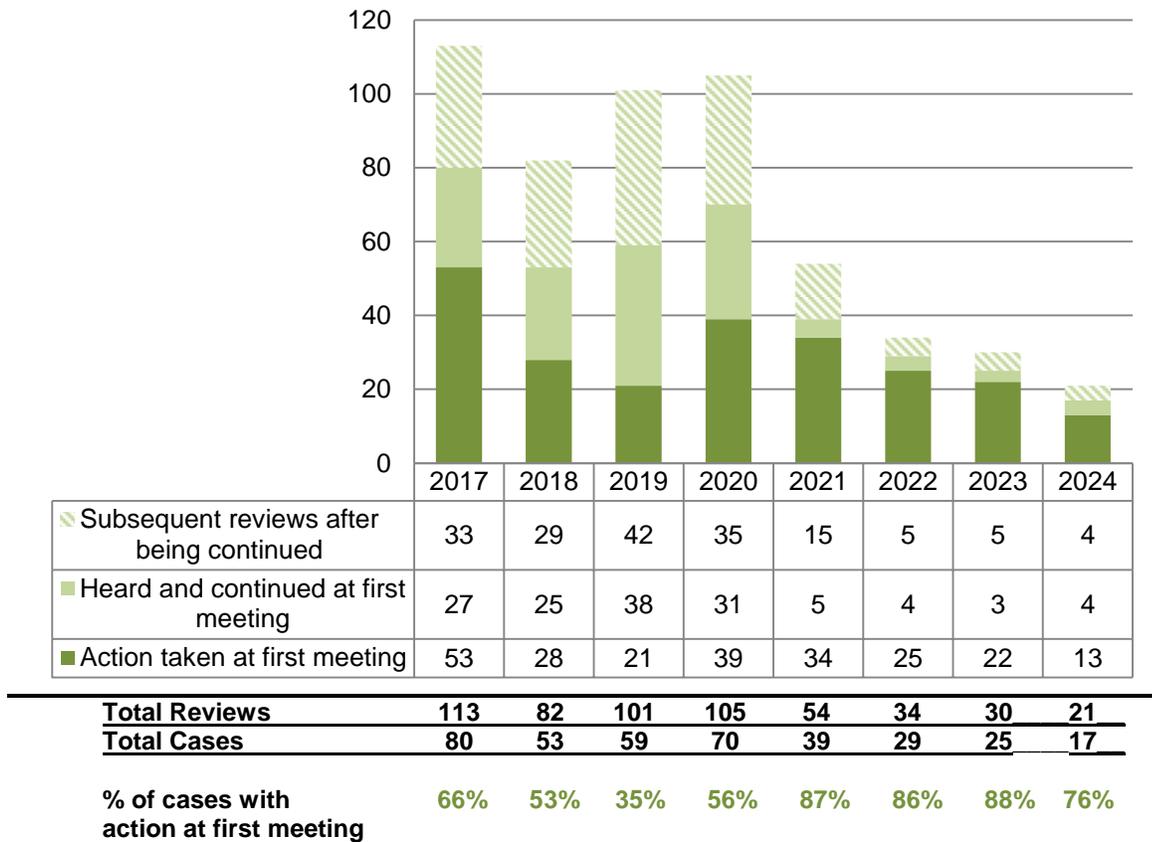
Using *Preserve 2040* as a guide, the Preservation Commission, will continue to represent the breadth of historic preservation which – in addition to built heritage – includes living heritage, cultural landscapes, the arts, intangible cultural heritage, and less tangible stories and histories. Preservation in Evanston celebrates the city's diverse environments, people, stories, and traditions rich with social and cultural meaning.

c. Performance of the Commission's resource management functions: In the 2024 calendar year, 182 total preservation reviews were conducted. Of the 182 total cases, no cases were denied and no cases were appealed to City Council. 17 cases were reviewed by the Commission, with 12 approved as presented and five approved with conditions. One additional application withdrew prior to action. Four cases took multiple meetings before action was taken.

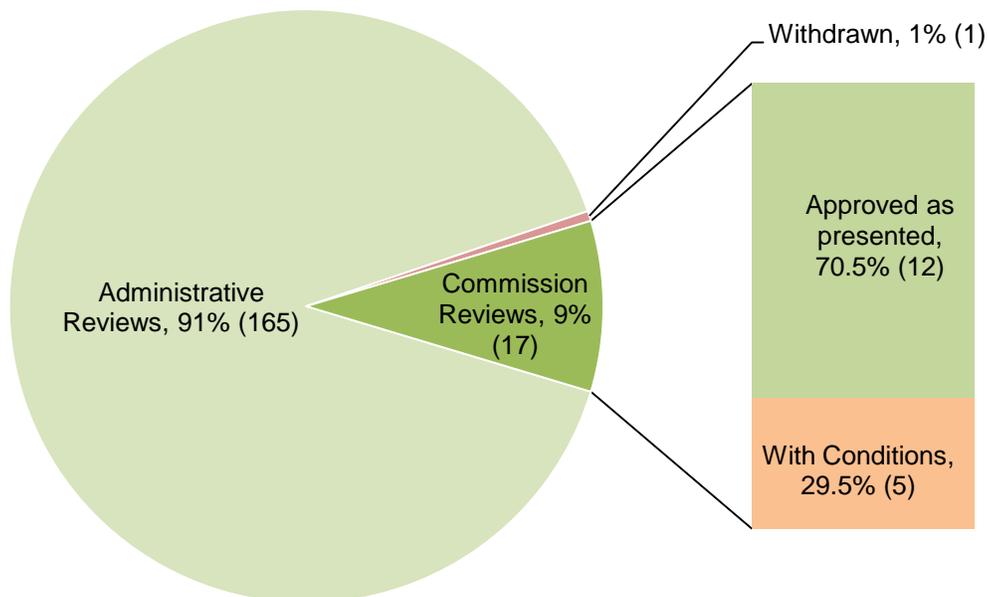
Of the remaining 165 applications deferred to City staff by the Commission's rules of circumstance, 99% of cases were resolved with mutual agreement and solutions that meet preservation standards with the remaining 1% withdrawing. This is a significant testament to the preservation ethic that has been nurtured in Evanston over the past five decades: increasing early consultation with homeowners and design professionals, offering technical assistance during preservation review, and embracing the use of innovative materials and construction techniques – all aimed at centering preservation to the needs of people living in Evanston today. The Commission and City staff will continue to work collaboratively with property owners to manage change, find mutually agreeable solutions that allow historic sites and structures to evolve and adapt, effectively communicate the significance of historic properties, and ground Evanston in a collective memory of place.

City staff undertook over 400 instances of technical assistance in 2024. These included site visits, phone and video consultations, in-person pre-application reviews, identifying qualified contractors, design professionals, and resources, assessing existing conditions, and making recommendations for preferred treatment approaches.

Annual Commission Case Review Comparison



2024 Commission Case Review Breakdown



Outlook

What concerns of the Commission should be brought to the City Council's attention?

1. Historic preservation is intersectional, and the Commission's subject matter expertise as well as existing and potential preservation tools and approaches should be leveraged in advancement of the City's diverse goals and objectives.
2. The Commission seeks mutually agreeable solutions that allow our historic sites and structures to evolve and adapt – meeting the needs of people living in Evanston today while continuing to communicate our past effectively. In recent years, the Commission has worked with property owners to approve over 95% of applications. This is a significant testament to the preservation ethic that has been nurtured in Evanston over the past five decades and will undoubtedly continue long into the future as part of our identity.
3. The Commission has taken significant actions over the past decade to make preservation mean more to more people. However, additional external communication and advocacy, as well as presentations to other Boards, Committees, and Commissions and offering one-on-one training to elected officials is critical to overcome past perceptions of historic preservation.
4. Although the Commission is supported by City staff, balancing the programs resource management functions while also advancing *Preserve 2040* would benefit from additional support. The Commission will continue to undertake initiatives that expand our volunteer capital in order to meet the demands of an evolving preservation program.

Additional Resources:

[Historic Preservation Program Webpage](#)

[Preservation Commission Webpage](#)

[Preserve 2040](#)

[2023 Annual Report](#)

[2022 Annual Report](#)

Membership List
(for the 2024 calendar year)

Total Meetings: 12

Member	Term Expires	Meetings Attended
Beth Bodan	November 2025	9
Stuart Cohen	December 2026	8
Sarah M. Dreller	April 2027	10
John Jacobs	October 2027	10
Carl Klein	January 2025	12
Amanda Ziehm	June 2025	10
Charles Smith	September 2026	10
Thomas Ahleman	September 2026	11
Joshua Bowes-Carlson	June 2026	8
Lesa Rizzolo	February 2027	8 (term started in March)
Matthew Johnson	February 2027	7 (term started in March)