



PRESERVATION COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

To: Members of the Planning & Development Committee

From: Chair Dreller and members of the Preservation Commission
Cade W. Sterling, Planner

CC: Elizabeth Williams, Planning Manager
Sarah Flax, Interim Director of Community Development

Subject: Preservation Commission Annual Report

Date: April 6, 2023

Structure

1. What is the composition of the Commission?

The Commission currently has 9 members and is comprised of up to 11 members appointed by the Mayor with advice and consent by 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. The current Commission includes architects, both practicing and trained, an architectural historian, a preservationist, a preservation planner, and owners of Landmarks and historic properties.

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

The Commission currently has two vacancies with two additional vacancies after the September 2023 meeting.

3. How many meetings are required per year?

The Commission has adopted a schedule of 11 meetings with an August recess and schedules additional special meetings and working group and subcommittee meetings as needed.

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

In 2022 the Commission held 11 regularly scheduled meetings, two subcommittee meetings, and ten working group meetings.

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

Yes, the Commission operated in 2022 with one primary staff liaison and one support staff member. Meetings are attended by both staff members. These roles will switch in 2023 with a new primary staff liaison, and the prior staff liaison stepping into a supportive role with priority over long-range plan implementation. For 2022, staff included:

Primary: Cade W. Sterling, Planner; **Support:** Carlos D. Ruiz, Planner

6. What was the Commission's budget for the past year? How does the budget impact, either positively or negatively, the Commission's operations?

The Commission had no budget for the 2022 calendar year and has operated without a budget for the better part of three decades. The lack of a budget impacts the ability to attend trainings, seminars, and conferences, such as the National Alliance of Preservation Commission's, as well as the Commission's ability to fully realize its education and advocacy goals and objectives.

7. How is citizen input encouraged and sought?

Citizen input is primarily received by way of written comments or in-person testimony as a result of mailed notification or posted agendas. Other forms of participation and engagement are limited but the Commission has set goals to improve participation and programmatic efforts related to education, advocacy, and technical assistance.

Goals, Objectives and Accomplishments

1. What is the Commission's mandate?

The Commission is empowered by way of the Preservation Ordinance 29-O-18 to identify, register, and safeguard the community's historic cultural and architectural heritage and is afforded nine statements of purpose and thirty powers and duties including binding and advisory design review. The Commission is charged exclusively with oversight of the City's Preservation Program and is empowered, and has, created rules of circumstance, and a framework for staff involvement including an administrative review and assistance structure.

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, Ridge Historic District, Northeast Historic District, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union Historic District. Between the local Landmarks and properties within local Historic Districts, the Commission has purview over ~2,500 properties or just under 10% of properties within the City.

In addition to these, the Commission, primarily administered by staff, provides advisory review and assistance if requested to properties within the Federal only portion of the Northeast Historic District, and the Federal Oakton Historic District as well as provide Section 106 review and comments in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office.

3. What were the Commission's objectives for achieving their mandate this past year?

The Commission's primary objective over the past two-years has been to diversify its role beyond resource management (case review), to be transparent and approachable, and to put more emphasis on education and outreach, technical assistance, and diversification of its composition and the resources it is charged with overseeing.

4. What major accomplishments did the Commission undertake to achieve those objectives?

The Commission embarked on an ambitious task to write a new long-range work plan, Preserve 2040. This document was developed in consultation with the Commission's private partner organizations, and resident volunteers, and charts an ambitious path for the Commission and more broadly the City's Preservation Program to follow for the next ~20 years. This document was adopted in December of 2022 and many initiatives are already underway including:

- **Initiative 2.4:** Work with the Planning and Zoning Division to amend the zoning code to include a section for adaptive use.
- **Initiative 2.8:** Work with the Economic Development Division to enact a Legacy Business Program.
- **Initiative 2.10:** Organize a Preservation Consortium or Preservation Advisory Sub-Committee.
- **Initiative 2.12:** Actively recruit future Commissioners with a focus on building a membership reflective of Evanston's diverse demographics.
- **Initiative 3.6:** Advocate for adoption of a citywide deconstruction ordinance.
- **Initiative 3.10:** Support the retention of significant landscape features which offer citywide environmental benefits including advocating for a citywide Tree Preservation Ordinance related to "heritage trees".

Additionally, the Commission re-surveyed the downtown area in an effort to identify contributing and Landmark eligible resources. This effort provides a significant planning tool capable of better informing and guiding decisions by other Boards, Committees, Commission's, and City Departments and agencies and can leverage preservation-based economic development opportunities in the downtown. In total, the Commission surveyed a total of 40 supplemental resources in addition to the 143 surveyed by the Preservation Commission in 2007-2008.

- Of those 40 supplemental resources surveyed, 11 or 27.5% were identified as Landmark Eligible, bringing the total number of eligible resources in the downtown to 31 between the 2007 and 2022 surveys. The downtown has 29 registered Landmarks currently.
- Of the 40 properties surveyed, only 3 or 7.5% were identified as not contributing to the character of the downtown
- The majority of properties surveyed were identified as being in good condition (21), 9 were identified as being in excellent condition, 10 in fair condition, and 0 in poor condition.
- The majority of properties surveyed were identified as having good integrity (18), with 10 having excellent integrity, 9 having fair integrity, and 3 having poor integrity.

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

The Commission's primary objective for the upcoming year is to implement aspects of the Preserve 2040 Plan, expand education and advocacy efforts, continue to build capacity of partner organizations, actively recruit diverse Commission membership, and implement a more robust administrative review and subcommittee framework.

6. What is the Commission doing to achieve these objectives?

Many initiatives underway, especially those at the intersection of preservation, economic development, and climate resilience remain a priority. New initiatives selected for implementation that relate to Education and Advocacy efforts in the 2023 calendar year include:

- **Initiative 4.1:** Reinstate a quarterly preservation and design-oriented newsletter and make it available online and on social media.
- **Initiative 4.4:** Prepare a preservation training publication and offer one-on-one orientation for elected officials.

The Commission proposed additional changes to its Rules and Procedures to build capacity for implementation including creation of three subcommittees:

- Application Pre-Review Subcommittee
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Subcommittee
- Education and Advocacy Subcommittee

Additionally, they propose a change to the Rules of Circumstance for Certificate of Appropriateness reviews to allow the Application Pre-Review Subcommittee to defer major work applications to staff under an administrative process utilizing the same review standards. A preservation consortium continues to meet as needed (monthly) to discuss preservation issues and opportunities across Evanston and to coordinate implementation of certain initiatives. Members of the consortium include the Frances Willard House and Museum, the Shorefront Legacy Center, The

Evanston History Center, the Preservation League of Evanston, and the Mitchell Museum.

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 based off the implementation matrix, implementation timeline, and priority levels outlined in the Preserve 2040 Long-Range Work Plan.

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

Annually

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

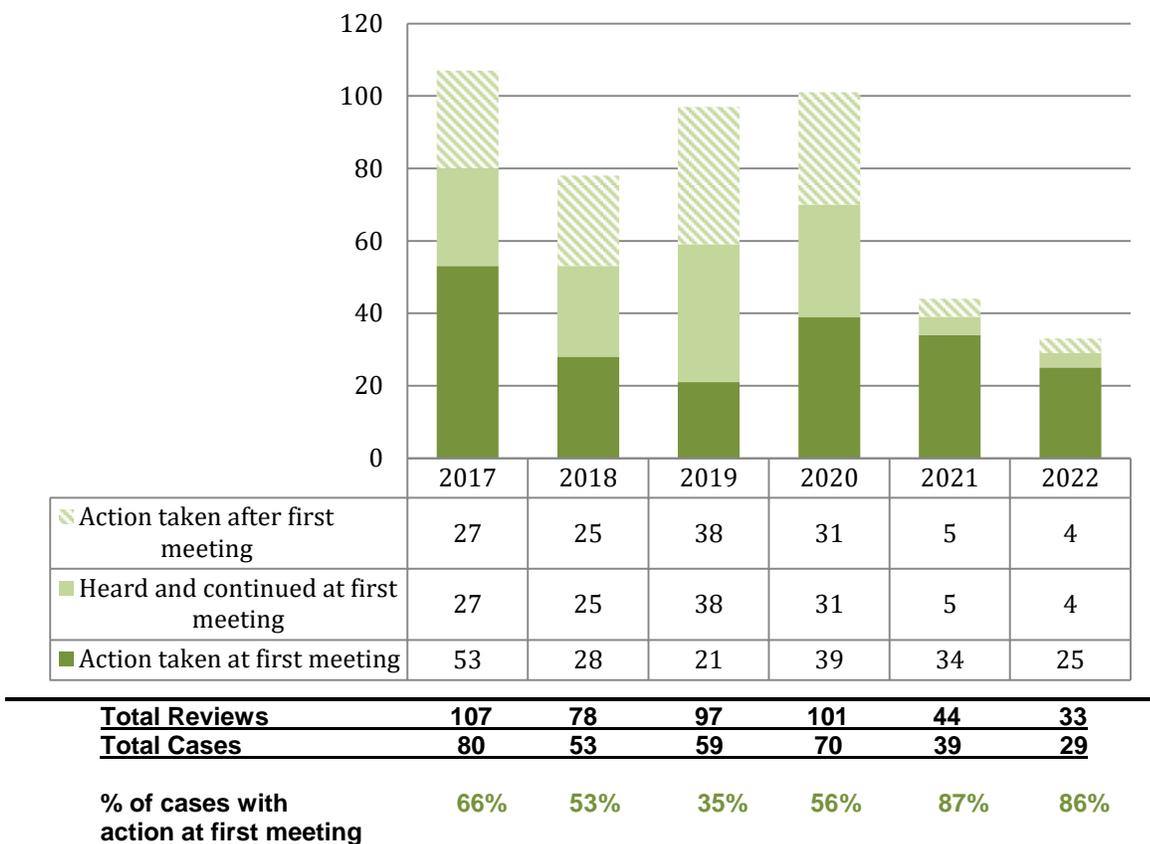
a. The appropriateness of its purpose and mandate: The Commission has an appropriate purpose, mandate, and powers and duties. However, since receiving binding design review roughly two decades ago, the capacity for the Commission to fulfill those duties which rest outside of resource management, have been limited. The current Commission has worked diligently to create additional capacity to perform these essential duties by way of more efficient Rules of Circumstance and administrative review processes, activation and coordination of partner organizations, and creation of new subcommittees and working groups. They have also worked to create a long-range vision for the City's Preservation Program, and created a realistic and forward-thinking framework for implementation of that vision by way of the Preserve 2040 Plan.

b. Community needs to be filled by the Commission: Many needs of the community relate to historic preservation, and the Commission has made significant strides in utilizing historic preservation as a tool to achieve the community's climate resilience and sustainability goals, as well as human-centered and preservation-based economic development. The Commission has also prioritized identification and registration of diverse community resources, particularly those of cultural and social significance, to have a more representative registry of protected resources which reflect the community as a whole. Additionally, the Commission seeks to diversify its membership to more closely reflect the demographics and perspectives of the community at-large, and to be more transparent in their processes and goals. These aforementioned needs by the Commission rest outside of the body's traditional resource management role, which it undertakes by efficiently processing requests for Certificate of Appropriateness while providing expert advice and technical assistance to applicants and homeowners whom come before the body. Recent (past year or two)

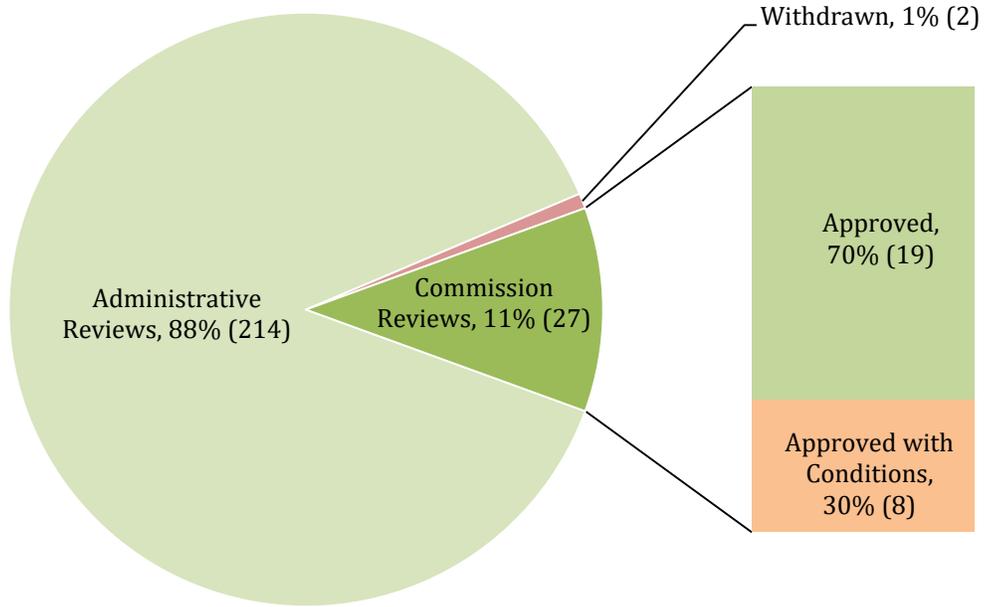
modifications to the Commission’s Rules of Circumstance and a subsequent increase in cases handled administratively have increased capacity at the Commission level and created a logical review framework homeowners and design professionals understood and were able to buy into. This has created additional buy-in for the program in whole and reduced overall burden, either perceived or real, for homeowners. The Commission has also created a significant vision and implementation plan that seeks to re-root itself as a working body that produces documents, reports, and other materials, and as a resource for the community and for homeowners of historic properties.

c. Performance of the Commission’s regulatory framework: In the 2022 calendar year, 243 total preservation reviews were conducted. This was up from 211 in 2021 but down from 334 in 2020. Of the 243 total cases, 29 were reviewed by the Commission although 2 withdrew following initial review. Of the 27 cases which the Commission took action on, eight (30%) were approved with conditions and 19 (70%) were approved as presented. Four cases took multiple meetings before action was taken. No cases were denied and no cases were appealed to City Council in 2022.

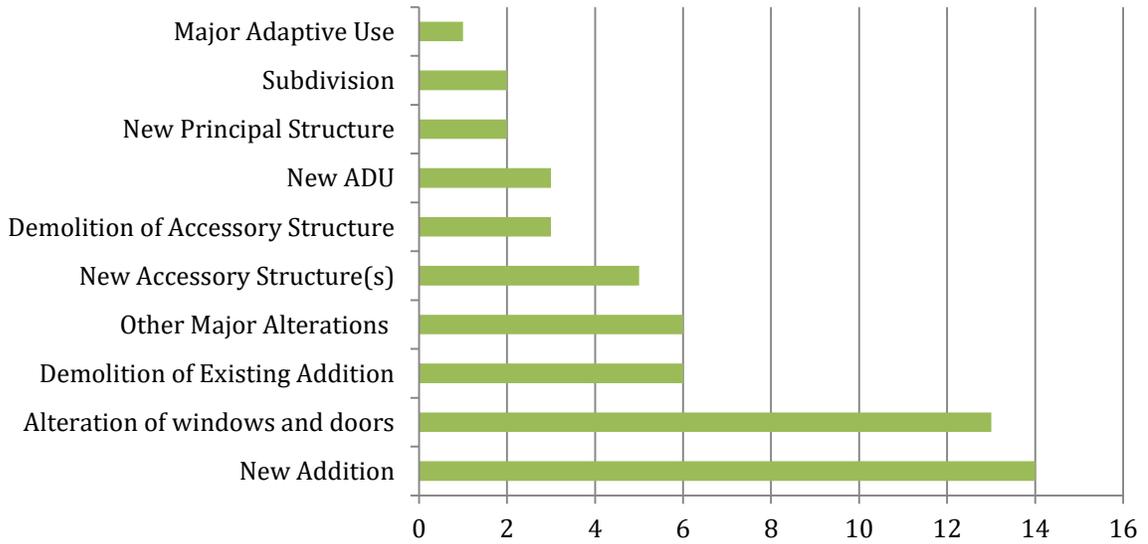
Annual Overall Case Review Comparison



2022 Commission Case Review Breakdown



Types of work reviewed by the Commission (2022)



Common Standards of Concern

Of the standards applied by the Commission, the following were frequently used as a means to vote against, apply conditions, or request modifications to proposals.

Standards for Alteration:

2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a property, structure, site or object and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features shall be avoided whenever possible except when retention represents a hazardous or dangerous condition.

5. Distinctive stylistic features, materials, finishes, examples of skilled craftsmanship, or examples of distinctive construction techniques that characterize a property, structure, site or object shall be treated with sensitivity.

6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture and other visual qualities.

Standards for Construction:

2. Proportion of facades. The relationship of the width to the height of the facades shall be visually compatible with properties, structures, sites, public ways, objects and places to which it is visually related.

3. Proportion of openings. The relationship of the width to height of windows and doors shall be visually compatible with properties, structures, sites, public ways, objects and places to which the building is visually related.

4. Rhythm of solids to voids in facades. The relationship of solids to voids in the facades of a structure shall be visually compatible with properties, structures, sites, public ways, objects and places to which it is visually related.

6. Rhythm of entrance porches, storefront recesses and other projections. The relationship of entrances and other projections to sidewalks shall be visually compatible with the properties, structures, sites, public ways, objects and places to which it is visually related.

7. Relationship of materials and texture. The relationship of the materials and texture of the facades shall be visually compatible with the predominant materials used in the existing structures to which it is visually related.

- d. **Staff performance:** Staff performance is reviewed by the Planning Manager by way of annual performance reviews.
- e. **Adequacy of public participation:** In 2022 staff fielded nearly 400 requests for technical assistance by design professionals, contractors, or homeowners. The Commission received 40 written comments for inclusion in the record, and 13 residents provided testimony in-person. The Commission would like to find ways to increase engagement with the public, and believes they have outlined specific initiatives to do so in the future as capacity allows. The Commission should be seen and used as a community resource.

The Commission met for 25 hours and 39 minutes between the 11 regularly scheduled meetings, and an additional 22 hours between subcommittee and working group meetings in 2022.

- f. **Coordination with City Council, other Boards, Committees, Commission's, and City departments and agencies:** Throughout the past year, the Commission has made significant efforts to support initiatives by City Council and other Boards and Commission's that intersect with the Commission's goals, objectives, and expertise. Examples include recent collaboration with the sustainability office and public works agency, the Environment Board, and participating on the Legacy Business Working Group with members of the Economic Development Committee. The Commission believes strongly that historic preservation is an underleveraged tool for meeting the City's climate action and economic development goals and would like to see more collaboration in the future.
- g. **Need for new goals, objectives and activities:** There are no immediate needs for new goals, objectives, or activities outside of those identified in the Preserve 2040 Plan.

Outlook

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

1. Commissioner recruitment and limited volunteer capital in the community remains a concern, especially recruitment of a more diverse (age, race, expertise/occupation) Commission membership. Opportunities to expand volunteer capital and availability of potential Commissioners exist and include:
 - a. Allowing former Commissioners to serve again after a period of absence
 - b. Opening membership to those who do not live in Evanston, but work in Evanston.
 - c. Allowing the Commission to appoint associate Commissioners as non-voting members who don't sit at the dais but can populate subcommittees and working groups to accomplish initiatives outlined in the 2040 Work Plan.
2. The lack of incentives including small grants, loans, or building permit fee waivers impacts the ability for vernacular landmarks and vernacular homes in historic districts to propose appropriate alterations where these improvements constitute a much higher percentage of the homes total value.
3. Regarding the Landmark nomination process, the Commission should be afforded the opportunity to present their report to the Planning and Development Committee by way of in-person testimony.
4. The ordinance does not easily facilitate the Commission's desire to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion goals by registering more culturally and socially significant resources or to pursue Conservation Districts at a neighborhood or business district level.
5. Historic preservation, and the expertise and work of the Commission remains an underleveraged tool for the City Council to achieve their sustainability and economic development goals and objectives.

Membership List

(for the 2022 calendar year)

Total Regularly Scheduled Meetings: 11

Member	Term Expires	Regular Meetings Attended	Subcommittee/Working Group Meetings
Beth Bodan, Secretary*	November 2025	9	3
Stuart Cohen, Vice Chair	December 2023	9	3
Sarah M. Dreller	April 2024	7	4
John Jacobs	April 2024	11	0
Carl Klein	January 2025	11	12
Jamie Morris*	September 2023	8	0
Suzi Reinhold, Chair*	September 2023	11	6
Mark Simon*	December 2022	10	0
Aleca Sullivan*	May 2025	7	0
Amanda Ziehm**	June 2025	7	0
* Second Term			
** Term started in June 2022			