



PRESERVATION COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT

To: Members of the Preservation Commission
From: Cade W. Sterling, Planner
CC: Elizabeth Williams, Planning Manager
Subject: Preservation Commission Annual Report
Date: April 9, 2024

Structure

1. What is the composition of the Commission?

The current Commission's membership represents 7 of 9 wards, and includes architects, preservationists, an architectural historian, a realtor, a buildings archaeologist, a landscape designer and contractor, and landmark owners. The Commission currently has 11 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.

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

The Commission currently has no vacancies and has four interested residents on a wait list to receive notification once a vacancy opens. The majority of the Commission's members are in their first term with no imminent vacancies.

3. How many meetings are required per year?

The Commission has adopted a schedule of 11 regular monthly 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?

The Commission held 11 regularly scheduled meetings and no special meetings or subcommittee meetings. The Commission conducted many 24 working group meetings not requiring public notice as they consisted of no more than 3 members. Working group meetings included those facilitating pre-application review, active commission recruitment, newsletter content, and legacy business development.

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

Yes, the Commission operated in 2023 with one primary staff liaison. Meetings are coordinated and attended by the staff liaison who acts informally in a secretarial role. Cade W. Sterling, City Planner

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 budget impacts the Commission's operations primarily by limiting education- and advocacy-related discussions to the monthly meetings that are already scheduled and a quarterly newsletter that requires too much volunteer time for most Commissioners. Reinstating an annual budget for education and advocacy would allow the Commission to work more effectively and strategically toward two interrelated objections: leveraging preservation to help advance the City's affordability, sustainability, and economic development goals and 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 in 2023 that actively encourages citizen input. Citizen input also continues to be sought via mailed notifications and posted agendas. Citizen input is primarily received by way of written comments or in-person testimony.

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 and architectural 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 broad 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 purview over ~2,500 properties or 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 2023.

3. What were the Commission's objectives for achieving their mandate and advancing initiatives within Preserve 2040 this past year?

The Commission had the following primary objectives which were guided for the first time since its adoption by the Preserve 2040 Plan as the Commission's strategic planning guide:

- Actively recruit members who better reflect Evanston's diversity and act as a panel of community members with qualified backgrounds rather than a panel of experts in a singular field.
- Prioritize transparency, be approachable, and create meaningful opportunities for education, outreach, and advocacy that reach a broad audience and communicate historic preservation's potential in advancing our shared community goals.
- Continue diversifying its role beyond resource management and fulfilling more of their powers and responsibilities within the Ordinance.

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

Active Commissioner Recruitment: The Commission launched an active recruitment campaign in English and Spanish in order to attract new members with diverse and broad backgrounds that better reflect Evanston's rich cultural heritage. The campaign addressed a common myth that you have to be an architect to serve on the Commission, and that the Commission's sole responsibility is resource management. The campaign stressed that the Commission is at its best when it represents the broad community and is comprised of a panel of passionate, qualified, kind, and rational residents, rather than as a panel of design experts. The campaign successfully attracted new members with backgrounds outside of architecture, as well as multiple community members interested in volunteering to advance the Commission's work and additional individuals who asked to be placed on a waitlist in order to be notified once additional vacancies exist.

Re-activated Newsletter: The Commission re-activated its historic preservation newsletter, publishing content for the first time in over three decades. The newsletter is the Commission's primary outlet for education and advocacy and seeks to inform residents on the value of historic preservation as well as seek input from community members on the Commission's active initiatives. The newsletter is currently released quarterly, and has been very well received. Following release of the newsletter, the number of subscribers to receive notifications from the

Commission increased by 200+ individuals or 8%, and now reaches an audience of 2,800 residents.

Increased Advocacy: The Commission expanded its advocacy roles in an effort to be more proactive and less reactive. Major items the Commission advocated for in 2023 include:

- a. The continued effort to adapt and rehabilitate the Harley Clarke property including a need to rethink approach and include best practices in order to achieve more viable responses to a REI and RFP;
- b. Discussing the inherent sustainability of preservation and shared goals surrounding climate resilience, deconstruction, and heritage trees with the Environment Board and Sustainability Division;
- c. Participating in the Certified Local Government program and advocating for the City following best practices that empower local Commissions during significant Section 106 and 707 reviews. The Commission successfully advocated for increased mitigation measures within the Memorandum Of Agreement between the State and Northwestern University regarding the demolition of the National Register eligible Ryan Field. Expanded mitigation measures included on-site interpretive elements that allow the site to continue to communicate its rich and varied past, expanded deconstruction and salvage requirements, and ensuring that historic documentation of the stadium be available locally at the Evanston Library and History Center as well as in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield;
- d. Expanded tribal consultation with the Historic Preservation Officers representing the various tribal groups whose ancestral homeland included Evanston;
- e. Successfully assisted in the development and launch of the City's Legacy Businesses Program, honoring living heritage and less tangible histories that are deeply associated with Evanston's identity and collective memory of place.

Speaker Series: The Commission coordinated a speaker series to provide additional opportunities for the public, partner organizations, and Commissioners to be exposed to a breadth of topics related to the connection between historic preservation and the City's goals of affordability, sustainability, and economic development as well as the *Preserve 2040's* focus on diversity. The series brought in experts in preservation-related fields who made presentations and answered questions at the start of Commission meetings.

The topics provided opportunities to educate the public and the Commission on various technical aspects and trends at the forefront of historic preservation. These included:

- Celebrating living heritage including people, stories, traditions, and businesses;
- Expanding the role of preservation to meet the challenges of today while remaining relevant as a tool that improves quality of life and the health of our built environment;
- Preservation as a powerful land-use tool that can retain naturally occurring affordable housing and stabilize neighborhoods susceptible to development pressure and changes in character;
- Preservation as inherent to sustainability and the value of deconstruction, salvaging materials, and adaptive use;
- The ongoing importance of archaeological resources, identifying and celebrating intangible cultural heritage and less tangible histories, and;
- Changing State laws and the need to improve consultation with the native peoples whose ancestral homelands included Evanston.

Training Model: In response to misunderstandings related to the purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance and the role of the Commission beyond design review, a training and orientation presentation was developed. The hour long presentation creates a consistent foundation and in-depth detail on the ordinance and the preservation program as well as the purpose, role, and powers of the Commission. The presentation provides consistent orientation for new Commissioners, elected officials, and community volunteers alike.

The training was presented to the full Commission in October and has subsequently been used for incoming Commissioner orientation. The training will be scheduled for presentation to the Community Development Department in 2024, where it will be further tested and refined prior to scheduling additional trainings for other City organizations and elected officials.

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

The Commission's primary objectives for the upcoming year are to implement aspects of the *Preserve 2040 Plan* and to ensure the new Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code integrate and expand upon the vision, goals, policies and initiatives within the City's newly adopted Preservation Plan.

Subgoals include:

- a. Continuing to confront common myths regarding historic preservation and align the City's preservation program with best practices including more emphasis on the City's diverse cultural heritage, less tangible histories, and living heritage.
- b. Continuing to expand education and advocacy efforts and outreach to the public and City officials;
- c. Building capacity through an expanded volunteer corps, and;

- d. Acting as a resource for the City and consistently advocating for the power of preservation to positively impact quality of life and the City's diverse goals around affordability, sustainability, and place-based economic development.

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

Initiatives within the Preserve 2040 Plan that were selected for implementation in the 2024 calendar year include:

- **Initiative 2.10:** Organize a Preservation Consortium or Preservation Advisory Sub-Committee including expanding and defining a volunteer corps that builds capacity for implementation of initiatives within *Preserve 2040*.
- **Initiative 3.6:** Advocate for adoption of a citywide deconstruction ordinance. The Commission modified this initiative to instead study model ordinances for similar communities, the feasibility of a deconstruction ordinance in Evanston, and incentives and other efforts that could expand deconstruction and salvage to advance CARP goals.
- **Initiative 4.4:** Prepare a preservation training publication and one-on-one orientation for elected officials. This has largely been completed, and the next phase of the initiative is conducting the trainings and getting the training materials into the community for consumption.
- **Initiative 4.12:** Continue and expand annual training and certification for local realtors. This initiative is currently underway and has been very well received. Implementation is anticipated for the Fall.

In addition to these, the Commission has developed a new Cultural Heritage Awards Program meant to recognize and celebrate the full breadth of historic preservation efforts represented through various themes.

The Commission has also sought to increase and clarify a framework to effectively facilitate its advisory and consultation powers and duties including: continuing to survey and document areas of high development potential, publicizing and supplementing the study list of eligible resources, creating clear processes for providing meaningful feedback on City-initiated projects and activities, and providing testimony to Boards and Commissions on non as-of-right proposals which affect significant but not registered resources.

Finally, the Commission will continue to identify, recognize, and celebrate cultural landscapes and less tangible histories throughout the City. Recently, the Commission amended the Statement of Significance for the Harley Clarke property to reflect the significance of its Jens Jensen and Alfred Caldwell Grounds, modern human-made dune landscape, and cultural associations to Native peoples. The Commission will also continue to strengthen relationships with Tribal Preservation Officers, and advocate for City policies regarding proactive consultation and inadvertent discovery.

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 during the Commission's public January meeting and decided via a roll call vote. 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.

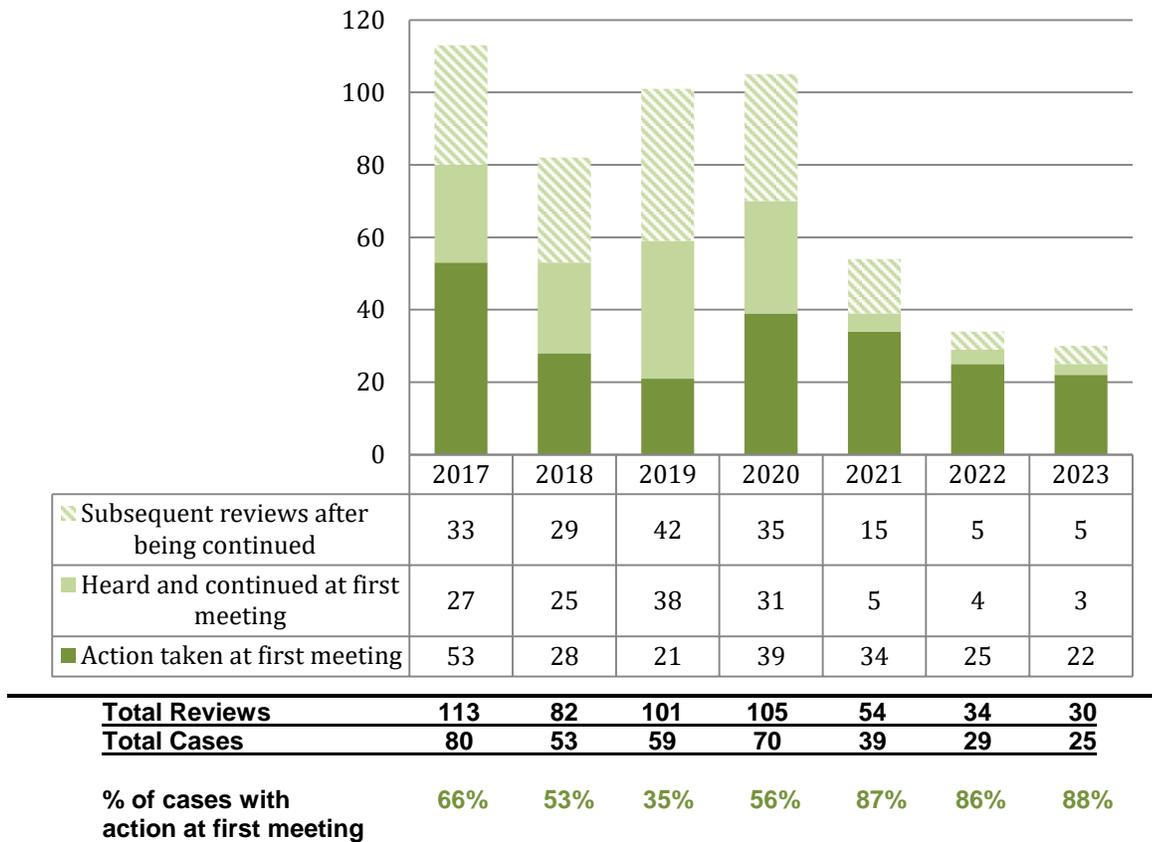
3. What is the Commission's evaluation of its performance in the following areas?

- 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 and the Commission has made significant strides in utilizing and advocating for historic preservation as a tool to achieve the community's climate resilience and sustainability goals and advance human-centered and preservation-based economic development efforts that capitalize on Evanston's unique identity and rich cultural heritage.

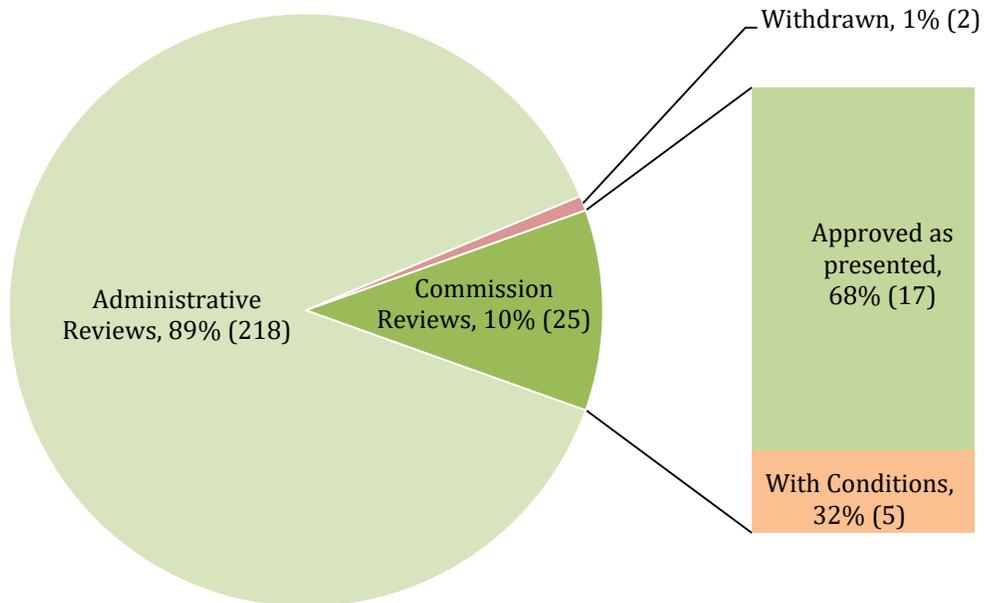
Preservation has evolved significantly and is more than built heritage, encompassing people, places, landscapes, businesses, stories, traditions, and art. Continued efforts need to be made to emphasize the role of the Commission beyond resource management and case review, as well as to emphasize that the Ordinance and program works for the community and is most effective when the community feels empowered to define their own identity and to connect that identity to whatever cultural heritage – tangible or not – that they feel is most relevant and should be celebrated and preserved.

- c. **Performance of the Commission's resource management functions:** In the 2023 calendar year, 243 total preservation reviews were conducted. Of the 243 total cases, no cases were denied and no cases were appealed to City Council. Twenty-five were reviewed by the Commission. Of the 25 cases which the Commission took action on, 18 (72%) were approved as presented, 5 (20%) were approved with conditions, and 2 (8%) withdrew prior to action. Three cases took multiple meetings before action was taken.

Annual Overall Case Review Comparison



2023 Commission Case Review Breakdown



Outlook

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

1. The State recently passed HB3413, the Human Remains Protection Act, to create a process for reinterment of ancestral human remains and repatriation of cultural objects. Native peoples believe that their dead were buried in a specific location for a reason and that they should be re-interred as close as possible to that location to respect deep cultural associations of place. However, the State law only creates a framework for reinterment on State property. In locations such as Chicago, Evanston, and the North Shore generally, State property is few and far between, creating a contradiction between the spirit of the law and its implementation. This is especially true in locations known to have large ancestral settlement sites, including much of Evanston, as the likelihood of inadvertent discovery is higher.

The inconsistency between the spirit of the law and its ability to respect the wishes of Native peoples who call Evanston home presents an opportunity for a local policy and procedure.

1. Conservation Districts remain an underexplored tool to retain naturally occurring affordable housing and stabilize neighborhoods vulnerable to change and development pressures.
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. The ordinance does not easily facilitate *Preserve 2040's* diversity, equity, and inclusion goals, and currently limits the ability to register more culturally and socially significant resources, cultural landscapes, or Conservation Districts at a neighborhood or business district level.
4. Historic preservation and the Commission's subject matter expertise remain an underleveraged tool for the City to achieve its goals and objectives.

Membership List
(for the 2023 calendar year)

Total Regularly Scheduled Meetings: 11

Member	Term Expires	Regular Meetings Attended	Working Group and other Meetings Attended
Beth Bodan	November 2025	10	7
Stuart Cohen	December 2026	8	5
Sarah M. Dreller	April 2027	10	32
John Jacobs	April 2027	9	4
Carl Klein	January 2025	11	15
*Jamie Morris	September 2023	6	2
*Suzi Reinhold	September 2023	6	9
***Aleca Sullivan	May 2025	7	3
Amanda Ziehm	June 2025	10	4
**Charles Smith	September 2026	3	0
**Thomas Ahleman	September 2026	3	0
**Joshua Bowes-Carlson	June 2026	5	0
***Samantha Steele	September 2026	0	0
* Second Term ended during 2023 calendar year			
** Term started partway through 2023			
*** Resigned prior to term ending			
Second term ended during 2023 calendar year			