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Red tape restricts Naples Historic District



GUEST COMMENTARY
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To successfully incorporate a preservation program in Naples, it begins with understanding what is possible.

The first two commentaries in this series of three addressed the challenges of preservation and explained some nuances of Naples Historical Society's district initiative. This article exposes the reality of a few rules and regulations that exist at the federal, state and local levels.

Much of the red tape that is associated with reviews of historic houses in the city of Naples is based on state regulation. Decisions on historic houses are often framed by state or federal rules that govern the city's authority.

On the other hand, yes, there are some decisions that are within the scope of judgment at the city of Naples.

We explore some of this red tape here. Following are a few examples of important components in a preservation program:

» **Contributing inventory list.** The city cannot authorize work on a historic structure if the house isn't recognized as such by the State Historic Preservation Office. That's a problem, for example, when a 1930 house is historic by all measures, but is not officially recognized as such at the state level.

The society is seeking approval from state and national agencies for an update to the Naples Historic District's list showing an inventory of contributing structures. This list is on the society's website. City Council and city staff acknowledge its legitimacy, but as state regulations go, we must undergo a required regulatory process

for their verification process. That is in process as of this writing.

» **Certified local government (CLG).** Collier County is a CLG, but the city of Naples isn't. Apparently, a CLG designation is a requirement at the state level for a governmental entity to render judgment on any restorative work to a historic structure in the Naples Historic District. We will be exploring this alongside the city of Naples.

» **The 50 percent rule.** There are many historic houses that lie outside of the Naples Historic District and, for the record, we have no interest in expanding the district boundaries. This said, we do believe the application of the 50 percent rule necessitates greater discussion. The community wins when everyone is on the same page.

» **Local flood ordinance.** On a similar note, we believe discussion is warranted regarding the length of time for cumulative improvements to a historic house that is outside of the district. Homeowners can spend up to 50 percent of the construction value of their house on improvements every 12 months; as an incentive to restore historic homes, we encourage discussion on changing that timeline to nine or even six months.

» **Moving forward.** While the Naples Historic District has been a recognized geographic neighborhood since 1987, there have been no formal declarations on this historically valuable community asset. That's a void of 30 years.

We have spoken to many dozens of people over the past year, residents and professionals, about this project, and it seems we have struck a harmonious chord. We are cautiously optimistic.

With this in mind, we have reached agreement with the city of Naples to hold an open discussion, a symposium, with

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select city staff, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Flood Insurance Program, Naples Area Board of Realtors, the State Historic Preservation Office and perhaps other representatives from Tallahassee who want to see Naples have more local control over our coveted historic district.

The Naples Historic District Symposium, hosted by the society, will be held Jan. 12 from 1-4 p.m. at River Park Community Center. This event is open to the public and will feature a panel discussion, led by a moderator. No reservations are needed and seating is available for 200.

In the end, we hope that our community, the residents of Naples, and certainly those who live in the Naples Historic District, can be a part of creating a lasting legacy that is reasonable for all.

Join us!

Reed is president and CEO of the Naples Historical Society Inc. This is the third and last in a series of commentaries about Naples Historical Society's work for the Naples Historic District Initiative. For Parts I and II, visit: www.NaplesHistoricalSociety.org. For more information, go to www.NaplesHistoricalSociety.org or call Naples Historical Society at 239-261-8164.

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