

# EDITORIAL OPINION

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## Naples Historic District: the means to the end



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Naples Historical Society's Historic District initiative is a public policy issue: a house may be just a house, but with over 90 of them in an area that is less than

one-tenth of 1 square mile, decisions on historic houses become a public policy issue.

Naples Historical Society knows this initiative can only move forward if the community understands the facts and features of our proposal to preserve the district.

Our goals are (1) to clear the way for a less-complicated, more local process for district homeowners to restore historic houses with personal finances, and (2) create guidelines for new construction in the vernacular, a term used to describe broad visual integrity.

Broad visual integrity isn't just a snappy soundbite; it beckons a community-endorsed vision that is reasonable, manageable and respectfully symbolic.

This is the basis of a workable preservation program for Naples.

If a homeowner doesn't want to restore a historic house or doesn't want to build new in the vernacular, he or she may build whatever they wish in the Naples Historic District. We will not

infringe on these rights.

How would preservation be managed if there are no mandates? The answer lies in many areas, but particularly through a savvy partnership with the Naples Area Board of Realtors (NABOR).

The society realizes every Realtor must know the district exists. We figured one effective way to do this would be to attach a marker to each district address in the Multiple Listing Service. NABOR agreed.

Rick Fioretti, NABOR's president, explains: "The Naples Area Board of Realtors could create an overlay map of the Historic District to appear on our MLS system that would identify the Naples Historic District properties and provide recognition to the home listings within the (district.) NABOR supports the mission of Naples Historical Society to preserve our local history and heritage for the community and future generations to enjoy."

NABOR's agreement will yield crucial awareness of the district's existence, something that's been elusive for decades.

With regard to new construction in the vernacular, consider the following. According to Preservation, a National Trust for Historic Preservation magazine, "about 75 percent of local historic districts include design guidelines for

compatible, appropriately scaled additions and infill structures."

Look around -- it's already happening.

We need to create uncomplicated guidelines for new construction in the vernacular. Keeping it simple -- KIS -- is essential.

So, what influences design guidelines for historic houses?

"Preserving" involves secretary of the interior and National Register-recommended approaches. There are four. These approaches refer to a gradient, each revealing the general scope of restorative work on an historic structure.

Preservation isn't strictly about keeping things the same. That's a misinterpretation.

These approaches range from making no changes (Historic Palm Cottage) to reconstruction and replacement (Naples Pier). The materials in the pier may be new, but its historic value has been brilliantly salvaged, and that preserves the pier's history.

Note that when I began to research this potpourri, I couldn't believe the words "preservation" and "demolition" were in the same writing. In fact, the Edison & Ford Winter Estates and the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation both used those two words in the same writing when making the case for their

capital plans.

When these four preservation approaches are applied to the Naples Historic District, our findings show that 71 percent of houses are historic by definition, and 85 percent are contributing structures; collectively the area reflects broad visual integrity.

These proportions are due to including houses that have "aged in" since the initial National Register application (1987) and to including 19 structures not in the original list that should have been.

There will be no more houses to retroactively classify in the future; that's why this is the last chance to preserve what we have.

A host of topics remain that require a steady determination to mine through to understand how to create a preservation program for Naples. Save the date: Naples Historic District Symposium, Jan. 12, 2017, 1-4 p.m. at River Park Community Center. This will be a panel discussion including professionals and institutions. It is open to the public. Seating is limited to 200.

Reed is president & CEO/Naples Historical Society Inc. This is the second of three related guest commentaries. The third installment will publish in January. Part 1 was in November. For more information, go to [www.NaplesHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.NaplesHistoricalSociety.org).