



Naples Historic District Initiative A Brief Recap – March 2018

Naples has had a nationally recognized historic district since 1987: the *Naples Historic District*. You read that date correctly. What's been missing is the legislation to help guide rehabilitation of this neighborhood, **if** the owners of historic houses so desire. You read that correctly, too: the proposed legislation is voluntary.

The history of preservation in Naples is interesting, and the Society took due note of it in order to prepare wisely for our current Initiative. In addition to holding copious meetings with residents, members of Naples City Council, the Planning Advisory Board and the Design Review Board, we met with staff from FEMA and the State Historic Preservation Office, participated in several City workshops, seminars and symposiums, traveled to Tallahassee, and walked door-to-door in an effort to get community feedback and develop this project. It's finalized, almost.

The City of Naples sent an historic preservation request to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in January, 2018. This request asked for authorization for the City's Design Review Board (DRB) to render judgement on modifications to historic houses. After its review, SHPO decided to require that the City of Naples become a Certified Local Government (CLG) first. The CLG designation is a statement that says there is a formal historic preservation program in place at the City. Note that being a CLG does not infringe on property rights. If it's required, we need to follow-through.

Becoming a CLG requires a bit more paperwork than was originally anticipated; this decision-reversal in Tallahassee pushed back the Society's Initiative about ten (10) months.*

The City of Naples and Naples Historical Society continue to work together, as best as possible, to finalize the re-submission for SHPO. A *CLG Summary* has been posted on our website, along with a mountain of other information, including the historic preservation program, email communications and other supporting documents. The bottom line is that becoming a CLG is manageable, considering the efforts from the past few years. For more information, see www.NaplesHistoricalSociety.org and click on Naples Historic District Initiative.

We plan to present this draft CLG package to Naples City Council in June, 2018, at a regular Council meeting (date and time to be determined).

It is important to understand that this package for SHPO will include an Ordinance that allows for historic preservation (voluntary); it will also include Design Guidelines.

There is nothing absolute or mandatory in these design guidelines. That is a wild misinterpretation about historic preservation! If a community has mandatory guidelines, e.g. Williamsburg or Alexandria, that's because the local community voted to do just that.

Naples has a 30+ year history of rejecting anything mandatory; the national guidelines were never intended to mandate anything. This is reaffirmed over and over in relevant literature from the Secretary of the Interior and the National Register. The Society's Initiative, too, does not mandate any design guidelines. The project will consider *recommended guidelines*.

Once the Initiative is approved by the State, we'll have an officially sanctioned historic preservation program where the local review board → the City of Naples' Design Review Board, can review proposed rehabilitation plans.

How will the program work? Fundamentally, preservation is based on two questions:

(a) Is the historic house in the Naples Historic District?

(b) Will the proposed changes maintain the historic character of the house?

The first question is black and white. The list of historic contributing structures in the Naples Historic District is recognized by the National Register; interested parties just need to call the City or Society or look on the Society's website. (If your house is not a recognized historic structure, then you are free to do what you want.) The second question requires erudite discussion between the petitioner's architect and the DRB**.

Satisfactory answers to those two questions will yield exemptions from the base floodplain elevation requirements from FEMA and exempt the homeowner from the so-called 50% Rule.

How is this possible? The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP is a program of FEMA) exempts historic houses if they are individually listed OR if they are in a nationally recognized historic district. Florida Building Code, Chapter 12, also supports exemptions for historic houses as long as there is a SHPO-sanctioned program in place and the proposed rehabilitation work will maintain the historic character of the house.

Misinterpretations of the aforementioned and a lack of understanding the breadth of what preservation actually is have been a preservation-crusher in Naples for y-e-a-r-s.

The Society reaches out to architects, developers, contractors, and real estate professionals every day to bust the myths of preservation and to share our plan to give options to homeowners of historic houses. We will continue to do so; education is essential.

*"The enemy of knowledge is not ignorance.
The enemy of knowledge is the illusion of knowledge."
--Stephen Hawking*

We are proud to share with you that over seven (7) houses have recently or are currently undergoing rehabilitation work because the "homeowner teams" already understand the nuances of preservation or have been made aware of the Society's Initiative. Most importantly, this rehabilitation is taking place because of the patient vision of these historic homeowners.

For those who have preserved, restored or rehabilitated a historic house or are in the process of doing so, we applaud you! We thank you for the legacy you've created in Naples. For those who have plans other than rehabilitation, we respectfully ask that you consider the breadth of options and exemptions available before you tear down an historic house. OR, perhaps you would consider new construction that features themes of Old Florida. Ultimately, whatever you choose to do, we understand that it is YOUR right and YOUR decision.

We can bring broad visual integrity to the Naples Historic District if our community, including residents, developers, real estate professionals and architects, would take the time to learn about the Society's Initiative. If you are interested in meeting with Naples Historical Society to learn more, please call at your convenience: 239-261-8164.

It Takes a Community To Preserve One!

*The Society received a letter from SHPO in June, 2017 indicating that the City did NOT need to become a CLG; this January 2018 SHPO decision-reversal was not anticipated.

**While the historic preservation program is not yet officially sanctioned by SHPO, in the meantime, homeowners can apply for these exemptions through the State; the process is EASY; call us for details!

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