

Chapter 15

Historic Preservation

A. OVERVIEW

Fairmont was founded in 1819 as Middletown, Virginia on the farm of Boaz Fleming and town lots were laid out in a grid pattern. From the simple beginnings of a basic land use planning method known as lot line planning, the City of Fairmont experienced tremendous growth through the development of the B&O Railroad, the boom of the manufacturing and mineral extraction industries and the advancement of the transportation and infrastructure systems. This period in time has given the City a rich history in the form of places, persons, residences, buildings and bridges. History is kept alive through education and preservation. A number of programs and organizations exist to help individuals and groups temporarily or permanently protect historical assets that are considered significant. The past is a building block for the future, and, if a plan is to be comprehensive, it must realize the significance of the past as a key element in planning for the future.

The Historic Preservation element of Fairmont's Comprehensive Plan recognizes that continued historic and cultural resource preservation, through sensitive land planning and other administrative means, is essential to the future historical and cultural well-being of the City.

B. GOALS AND ACTIONS

The goal and actions pertaining to Historic Preservation have been developed to enhance the quality of life through the preservation of resources that are significant for their architectural, archaeological, economic, educational, social and cultural values.

Goal:

Enhance & protect Fairmont's position as a Historic and Cultural destination for visitors and residents.

Actions:

- Respect historic values and preserve historic sites and buildings that represent period architecture or history in Fairmont.
- Establish historic districts in areas that can benefit from the special recognition and protection offered by quality design principles.
- Promote the practice of adaptive reuse for historic properties through the use of financial and regulatory incentives.
- Build upon existing architectural features to develop quality design principles to enhance the community's quality of life.

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

1. Historic Properties and Districts

a. Within the City of Fairmont there are two historic districts and several individual properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These include:

- The Downtown Historic District
- The Fleming/Watson Historic District
- The Woodlawn Cemetery Historic District
- Fairmont Senior High School
- The Marion County Courthouse and Sheriff's Residence
- Thomas W. Fleming House
- High Gate
- Shaw House
- Robert H. Mollohan/Jefferson Street Bridge
- Masonic Temple
- Fairmont Normal School Administration Building/Kennedy Barn
- Jacob Hutchinson Block

2. Significant Properties Not Currently Listed

a. The following areas need to be surveyed and evaluated:

- Locust Avenue
- Fairmont Farms/Watson Family Farms
- Palatine
- Pennsylvania Avenue/Bellview
- Coal Run Hollow
- Meredith Tunnel
- Fairmont Beltline

D. BASIC ISSUES

1. Preservation Activities (Public and Private)

a. The Fairmont Historic Landmarks Commission was established in 1989 and have been involved implementing and/or planning to implement the following activities:

- They have created a new brochure of the downtown historic district with a district map and a brief history of Fairmont. Buildings within the district are designated as contributing or noncontributing structures.
- The Commission, Main Street Fairmont and the City of Fairmont joined together to install new street signs to show the boundaries of the Downtown Historic

District along with interstate signage identifying the presence of the Downtown Historic District.

- The Commission spearheaded the creation of the Historic Preservation Review Commission in order to establish design review authority within the Downtown Historic District. The HPRC is currently working towards obtaining design review authority within the Fleming/Watson Historic District.
 - The Commission is currently working to provide signage to designate historic sites within the City of Fairmont.
- b. The restoration of the Jefferson Street/ High Level Bridge (now named the Robert H. Mollohan/Jefferson Street Bridge) provides the centerpiece for historic preservation in the downtown area.
- c. The High Gate Carriage House serves as a local preservation success story through the rehabilitation work by the Friends of High Gate using a combination of funding from the National Trust and local banks along with major local fund-raising activities the first floor and exterior were restored, and in the 1990s High Gate Carriage House became a multi-purpose facility housing regional cultural and historical exhibits, educational classes, workshops for adults and children, in addition to providing a new local venue—and one of the few historic properties available—for conference, business and social use. In 2002, the Vandalia Heritage Foundation partnered with Friends of High Gate, to ensure continued preservation and restoration of the Carriage House and Gardens. Vandalia Heritage Foundation will enhance use of the Carriage House and Gardens and facilitate restoration of the second floor of the building, to be utilized for office space. With the completion of the second-floor restoration, Vandalia is truly able to “Keep the Gates Open,” preserving a significant National Historic Landmark in West Virginia’s history, and an important moment in the local history of Fairmont.
- d. Main Street Fairmont continues to promote historic preservation within their boundary area, which includes the entire Downtown Historic District. The organization works closely with the West Virginia Main Street Office and the National Trust to promote historic preservation in various activities including:
- A sign & façade grant program;
 - A loan pool for property owners and businesses. Funds can be used for exterior facade and interior rehabilitations along with acquisition and fixtures or equipment;
 - Raised funds and implemented decorative historic lighting;
 - Coordinating streetscape improvements of trees and planters; and
 - Create various public awareness and public education activities and promotions in regard to downtown.
- e. Driven by the mission of “economic revitalization through historic preservation” the Vandalia Heritage Foundation is working to build a strong foundation for North Central

West Virginia's future. Since its inception in 1998, Vandalia has developed an accomplished portfolio – serving as key partner on over fifty projects and programs. In 2002 the Vandalia Heritage Foundation hosted the renowned International Preservation Trades Conference in Fairmont and are the owners of the grand Hutchinson House on Benoni Avenue.

2. Effectiveness

All of the above programs have a positive impact on historic preservation activities in the City. These programs and organizations must continue to strive towards acceptance in the community of historic preservation to increase their effectiveness.

3. Potential Threats to Preservation

Historic preservation in Fairmont remains a challenging activity because it is generally not perceived as being economically feasible. There is a lack of interest and or understanding by the general public and a corresponding lack of information about preservation. Economic factors include a lack of funding sources for rehabilitation and a somewhat depressed economy which results in general lack of maintenance leading to deteriorated properties. In a related area, many poorly maintained properties are owned by absentee landlords and many are rental properties whose occupants are students, which are not motivated to assist in maintaining the properties.

4. Opportunities for Preservation

a. The tremendous resources of the City provide a great opportunity for preservation in Fairmont. These opportunities include:

- heritage tourism;
- downtown revitalization;
- neighborhood conservation; and
- housing for the elderly and young professional

b. The factors which contribute to these opportunities are as follows:

- potential for regional growth;
- low crime rates;
- good community values;
- reasonable prices for buildings;
- local employee base in downtown; and
- new funding methods for projects, such historic tax credits;
- quality infrastructure system.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Short Range



- a. Involve the public in preservation. The public can be involved in developing preservation goals by:
 - participating in this comprehensive plan update;
 - participating in the Main Street program;
 - participating in upcoming neighborhood revitalization programs ;
 - volunteering to serve on the Historic Landmarks Commission or Historic Preservation Review Commission;
 - visiting the Vandalia Heritage Foundation’s Preservation Resource Library; and
 - seeing visible results of preservation in general.
- b. Integrate preservation into other aspects of planning and regulation.
 - Preservation will be more integrated in the future in planning since it now has an element in this comprehensive plan.
 - The Historic Preservation Review Commission is working with City Council to strengthen the local historic preservation ordinance regarding design review.
 - Introduce levels of design review, design standards and performance measures to the community through the zoning and or land development ordinance.
 - Main Street Fairmont is emphasizing the strong role that historic preservation will have in the revitalization of downtown and the Vandalia Heritage Foundation provides the technical expertise to guide individuals and organizations in both commercial and residential areas of Fairmont.
- c. Mitigate conflicts between preservation and development. The City believes that if such cases should arise, there is the need to educate the public, promote preservation, coordinate efforts, and in general to work together to insure that conflicts are minimized as much and as soon as possible.
- d. There is a strong recognition that public education activities are extremely important and that a marketing plan devoted to the benefits of historic preservation should be developed with input from the City of Fairmont, Main Street Fairmont, the Historic Landmarks Commission, the Historic Preservation Review Commission and the Vandalia Heritage Foundation. The plan should focus on activities such as:
 - regular tours;
 - sites and structures
 - articles;
 - special events;
 - brochures; and
 - letters to the editor/essays.
- e. The continued installation of historic district signs is an important project.
- f. All of these varied activities are funded from a combination of sources including federal and state grants, local government funds, and private donations. It is anticipated that

future projects will be funded from similar combination of funds. Organizations need to work harder at identifying funding sources that can be utilized by individuals in preservation projects

2. Medium Range

- a. Capitalize on the bridge restoration project and other successful preservation projects to cultivate a pro preservation attitude.
- b. Design review is very important for the continued success of preservation, but it must be acknowledged that it is not always seen as economically practical.

3. Long Range

- a. Continue to promote and develop the rich historical attractions of Fairmont.
- b. Incorporate historic elements into new development projects.
- c. Emphasize re-adaptive use and infill technique.