



State Historic Preservation Office
Oklahoma Historical Society
800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
405/521-6249
FAX 405/522-0816
<http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpom.htm>

TEN THINGS SUCCESSFUL PRESERVATIONISTS KNOW

1. They know the authentic history of their community.

Every community, no matter how large or how small, has its own unique heritage. It may be tempting to promote local myths and legends, but the real story about how the community was established and how it developed is actually far more interesting. The community's buildings, structures, districts, sites, objects, and landscapes reflect its past, and their protection and continued use benefits everyone. Successful local preservation efforts attract heritage tourists who know the difference between fact and fiction. When your community provides a quality visitor experience, tourists come back again and tell their friends about you, and positive economic benefits result.

2. They know which properties represent their community's history.

The most basic step in developing a local preservation program is documentation of the community's buildings, districts, structures, sites, and objects through a survey (see SHPO Fact Sheet #4). The SHPO may already have information about your community's historic properties on file. Visit the SHPO's website or call to learn what is available.

Survey results identify which properties are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, guide local preservation commissions in their designation process under local ordinances, assist individual property owners pursuing federal and state tax credits or other financial incentives, provide the basis for brochures and other promotional materials about your community, facilitate community planning activities, and much more. Knowing which properties have real significance will help you make the best use of both human and financial resources required for preservation projects and set priorities so that every proposed demolition or alteration of an older building does not become a controversy.



State Capitol Building, Oklahoma County

3. They know the historic preservation vocabulary.

To communicate effectively with colleagues, property owners, elected officials, and others you need to know the historic preservation vocabulary. For example, what does historic property mean? To the SHPO the phrase means that a property is listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. But others may ascribe a different meaning to the term. For an extensive glossary of historic preservation terms consult *Tomorrow's Legacy: Oklahoma's Statewide Preservation Plan* (available in hard copy from the SHPO or on its website).

4. They know the laws and regulations that facilitate preservation efforts in their community.

There is a common misconception that there is a law to protect anything considered historic, but this is not the case. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act extends limited protection to properties that are either listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, but this protection only applies when a federally funded, licensed, or permitted activity impacts such a property. Even the Section 106 process does not guarantee the historic property's preservation in place (see SHPO Fact Sheets #1, #2, #10, and #11). Keep in mind that Oklahoma statutes do not provide protection for historic properties. The most effective preservation tool is the local historic preservation-zoning ordinance that authorizes a city government to designate historic districts and landmarks and conduct an approval process for alterations, demolitions, and new construction impacting the locally designated properties, regardless of funding sources. Take time to learn what the law can and cannot do to protect your community's heritage. The SHPO's Certified Local Governments (CLG) Program assists city governments that enforce preservation ordinances (See SHPO Fact Sheet #5).



Public Meeting, Oklahoma Historical Society Boardroom

5. They know the roles of all levels of government in preservation projects and programs.

Federal, state, tribal, and local governments all play roles in the Nation's historic preservation programs. It is important to understand when and how these agencies affect the outcome of projects that impact historic properties. Some Federal agencies own historic properties and are totally responsible for their protection. The National Park Service owns and operates National Historic Sites, such as the Washita Battlefield in western Oklahoma. Other Federal agencies, including the General Services Administration, the U.S. Department of the Army, and many others also own historic properties in Oklahoma. While a particular Federal agency may own no historic property at all, it is still responsible for the identification and treatment of significant historic properties that its federally funded, licensed, or permitted actions may impact (see SHPO Fact Sheets #2 and #10).

State agencies also participate in preservation efforts in Oklahoma. Obviously, the Oklahoma Historical Society owns and operates numerous historic properties across the state, and the SHPO, a division of the Society, administers the federal preservation programs in Oklahoma (see SHPO Fact Sheet #8). Other State agencies also own and care for historic resources, such as the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation, which owns Lake Murray State Park and Robbers Cave State Park (listed on the National Register of Historic Places). The Oklahoma Archeological Survey (OAS), University of Oklahoma, identifies and evaluates the state's prehistoric archeological sites and maintains the files of archeological survey efforts and archeological excavations across the state. The Oklahoma Main Street Center delivers critical services to participating communities working to revitalize their historic commercial districts.

Tribal governments are sovereign nations and have special relationships with the Federal government, including the right to request assumption of SHPO duties on tribal land. Also, tribes own many of Oklahoma's exceptionally significant historic resources. For example, the Choctaw Nation owns Wheelock Academy, a property extremely important to their tribe and designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL). Federal law guarantees tribes an opportunity to comment on federal undertakings that may or may not occur on their lands (see SHPO Fact Sheet #10).

Local governments actually exercise greater control over more historic properties than any other government entity. Local governments may own historic properties, such as a city hall listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and they may enforce local historic preservation zoning ordinances that protect a wide range of historic properties.

6. They know when and how private organizations can assist their local preservation activities.

Numerous private organizations have historic preservation as their primary focus, and such organizations are active at the national, state, and local levels. The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) serves the Nation's preservation community, and the NTHP's Southwest Office in Fort Worth serves Oklahoma. The NTHP provides educational programs, publications, leadership training, grant assistance, technical assistance, guidance in public policy development, and much more. Preservation Oklahoma, Inc. (POK) is our statewide nonprofit organization, and POK presents educational programs, guides statewide advocacy efforts, and partners with the SHPO to produce a quarterly newsletter, administer Oklahoma's Most Endangered Historic Places Program, and present the annual statewide preservation conference. Local nonprofit groups have formed in Oklahoma to focus on the preservation concerns of specific communities. Visit the SHPO's website for links to these and other preservation organizations. County historical societies and other groups may also be involved in historic preservation at the local level. Contact the SHPO for information about local organizations in your area.



7. They know what financial incentive programs really exist for preservation projects.

Every successful preservationist understands that the majority of restoration/rehabilitation work is carried out with the owner's financial resources or with a conventional loan. While public and private sector grant opportunities do occur, they are rare, highly competitive, generally require a matching share, and come with special conditions. Individual property owners seldom qualify for such funding. The most important financial incentives for preservation are the federal and state rehabilitation tax credits for income-producing properties (private homes do not qualify). Visit the SHPO's website for details about these tax credits (See SHPO Fact Sheet #3). Remember to be skeptical when someone tells you "if you buy a historic house or building, you can get a grant to fix it up" and when someone assures you that they can get a grant for your preservation project if you just pay their fee. The best way to learn about preservation grants and other incentives is by reading the publications or visiting the websites of established organizations such as the NTHP or POK or of government agencies such as the NPS or the SHPO.

8. They know what strategies can encourage preservation projects even when no legal or financial tools apply to the situation.

When it comes right down to it, there is a good chance that there will be no special financial incentives to assist with your preservation project or no legal remedies for stopping a demolition or insensitive alteration of a significant historic property in your community. There are still things you can do to save the property. Just talking to the threatened property's owner to find out what alternatives may remain can be a big help. It is important to get involved early so that you have the best possible chance to avoid public controversy. Public opinion can be a powerful tool, and letters to the editor, petitions, pickets, and public meetings have all been used to affect preservation of a significant property. However, you must be realistic. Remember that private property owners have rights, and there simply may be nothing you can do. Probably the most difficult thing a local preservation leader has to do is decide when it is time to walk away from a situation. In some extreme cases, preservationists take their issues to court. You must be prepared for the investment of time, emotion, and money such an action may require.

9. They know when and how to select a preservation professional and how to use their services.

We cannot all be experts on everything, and sometimes hiring a qualified professional to help with project planning or perform other specialized tasks may be the best use of your limited financial resources. These individuals can help you avoid costly mistakes and ensure you have a quality result for your hard work and investment. Professional organizations maintain lists of individuals and firms working in their respective fields, and these lists are good starting places to identify qualified people in your area. Talk to others who have completed similar projects and find out who provided planning and other consultant services to them. Carefully interview prospective consultants and check references. Professional associations and preservation agencies or organizations may be able to provide guidelines for consultant selection. Once you hire a consultant, work closely with them and do not hesitate to ask questions or insist on evidence of progress.

10. They know that almost all successful preservation work is locally initiated, locally led, and locally financed.

We conclude with this point because it is perhaps the most important one on the list. Government agencies and nonprofit organizations offer a wide range of services as illustrated above, but these are only tools. There has to be someone who can put them to good use in the local community if we are going to preserve Oklahoma's rich heritage.

Local citizens know their communities best, and there is no substitute for your knowledge and influence at the local level. In most instances, the financial resources for preservation projects will be generated in the local community, too. So, if you want to succeed in the preservation of the buildings, structures, sites, districts, objects, and landscapes that define the character of your community, stay involved in your local government and in your neighborhood. Historic preservation is simply another community revitalization tool, and it works with individual initiative, hard work, and effective leadership.