

HISTORIC ITHACA STRATEGIC PLAN (2015–2020)

Approved January 22, 2015

This plan is intended to serve as the guiding document for Historic Ithaca’s next five years, from 2015 to 2020. This document has staff and board commitment, and both will be partners in its implementation.

I. Planning Process

In December 2012 an ad hoc group of Historic Ithaca (HI) board members and staff met to discuss the preparation of a five-year strategic plan. Chaired by board member Leslie Chatterton, attendees included board President Dennis Stein; former board President Tania Werbizky; Julee Johnson, chair of the HI Development Committee; Rod Howe, chair of the Education Committee; Executive Director Alphonse Pieper; and Preservation Coordinator Kristen Olson. Though not present at the initial meeting, Significant Elements and Work Preserve Manager Sara Johnson has participated in the planning process.

Not having completed a plan in recent years, the ad hoc task force looked to recent plans of sister organizations, including the Preservation League of New York State (PLNYS) 2011-2014 Strategic Plan, Preservation Buffalo Niagara (PBN) 2013-16 Strategic Plan, and Historic Albany Foundation (HAF) 2012-2015 Strategic Plan. The task force settled on a planning model similar to that of PLNYS, while drawing on other aspects of the PBN and HAF plans.

The task force identified six programs integral to the activity of Historic Ithaca: **Community Engagement, Significant Elements, Work Preserve, Building Materials Conservation, Technical Services, and Library of the Built Environment**, each incorporating one or more of four identified themes: **Education, Advocacy, Action, and Organizational Sustainability**. The first three themes relate directly to Historic Ithaca’s mission centered on education, advocacy, and action. The fourth, Organizational Resources and Sustainability, concerns the internal functioning of the organization. Staff members agreed to share in the preparation of written descriptions for the four themes and detailed evaluations of each of the six programs.

Each program evaluation was reviewed and discussed by a “focus” group organized by the staff preparer. Generally the six-to-ten member groups included representatives from the board and committees, HI Friends, local preservation professionals, and other community members with relevant organizational expertise. Staff revised each evaluation to incorporate focus group comments. The revised descriptions and evaluations comprise this preliminary report, intended to provide board members with a deeper understanding of the organization’s various activities, such as: relationships between various programs; target audiences; what’s working; what can be improved; programs to be expanded or dropped; and budgetary and staffing implications. These and other issues related to HI’s future were the topics of

a five-hour board retreat held on Saturday, November 16th, 2013, 8:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. and facilitated by Judith Saul.

In the months following the board retreat, the ad hoc committee continued to meet with staff and board members, the general goal being to craft a logical framework on which to articulate the plan. Preliminary drafts underwent review by the ad hoc committee, staff, the board, and two standing committees, Advocacy and a newly established Education Committee. As a result “themes” were revised to become more closely linked to the mission statement; focus areas redefined to target areas historic preservation and community development; two programs associated with each focus area; The Building Materials Conservation Lab (BMC) and the Historic Ithaca Library (Lib), formally identified as programs, have been reclassified as support facilities – BMC linked to Significant Elements and Work Preserve and the Lib to Preservation Services and Community Engagement. General Management and Operations is now differentiated as a stand-alone category. The Historic Ithaca Strategic Plan (2015 – 2020) was submitted to the Board of Directors for approval at the regular monthly meeting held on November 20th.

II. Historic Ithaca Founding

Historic Ithaca was founded in 1966 in response to Ithaca’s early 1960s Urban Renewal program and the ensuing demolition of the early City Hall (1844-1966). Similar threats to the Boardman House (1867) and the iconic Clinton House (1828) resulted in a grassroots campaign to stop the demolitions and, more broadly, to institute protections for the city’s important historic resources. The group’s early activities focused on coalition building, fundraising, and drafting a local preservation ordinance that was adopted by the City of Ithaca in 1971. The ordinance established the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission and the designation of the DeWitt Park Historic District. By the time of the nation’s bicentennial in 1976, preservation of the city’s significant historic buildings had been established as a key component of Ithaca’s community development program. In the early 1970s, Historic Ithaca saved the Clinton House and turned its spaces into income-generating uses, demonstrating that a non-profit organization could run an income-generating entity that contributed to the city’s tax base.

Program History

Preservation Advocacy and Services—The first employee of Historic Ithaca was an architectural conservator, helping to establish HI’s expertise in this field of historic preservation. Historic Ithaca counts the preservation of some 20 buildings and places throughout Tompkins County among its success stories. The organization was a vital partner with city and neighborhood activists in the designation of the University Hill Local Historic District (2003), the Henry St. John Local Historic District (2014), and with the city and Ithaca Downtown Alliance in the designation of the Ithaca Downtown National Register District (2005). In the past, Historic Ithaca also held

Old House Fairs, educational events and workshops to educate homeowners who sought information on how to maintain their historic homes.

Significant Elements—In 1991 Historic Ithaca expanded its preservation work by opening Significant Elements, Ithaca’s architectural salvage warehouse, selling house parts, furniture, and architectural elements to the general public. In addition to providing an avenue for public education, Significant Elements reduces the amount of construction debris in the local landfill and generates revenue for other Historic Ithaca programs. Most recently it has also provided hands-on experience and training for Work Preserve participants.

The State Theatre of Ithaca—In the late 1990s, Historic Ithaca undertook a major challenge with the acquisition and restoration of the condemned Ithaca’s State Theatre and initiated efforts to list the building on the National Register of Historic Places (1996). Community concern intensified as demolition appeared inevitable. In the spring of 1998, Historic Ithaca, with broad community support, stepped up to purchase the building and establish the State Theatre Restoration Project (1998-2001). Historic Ithaca mobilized community volunteers, statewide preservation organizations, local foundations, and private donors to secure financing and manage restoration work. On December 5, 2001, Historic Ithaca sponsored a gala opening. In 2009, the theatre was sold to the newly established not-for-profit, The State Theatre of Ithaca, Inc., enabling Historic Ithaca to return to its core mission. The theatre remains a key component of Ithaca’s downtown arts scene.

Center Street headquarters—Historic Ithaca continues to provide the leading voice for historic preservation throughout Tompkins County and the Finger Lakes region. Since moving its facilities to 210/212 Center Street in Ithaca’s Southside neighborhood, Historic Ithaca has offered public education opportunities through workshops, tours, and events; provided information and technical services such as researching historic buildings and drafting designation reports; and advocated for protecting historic resources in the public’s interest. In recent years the organization has spawned new programs to address 21st century issues: historic preservation as a means to enrich cultural identity, promote resource sustainability, enhance economic development, and improve quality of life in our community.

Work Preserve—In 2010 Historic Ithaca launched Work Preserve, a program based on the belief that the revival of traditional building crafts is key to fully understanding and sustaining historic buildings and historic communities. The program, targeted to youth and young adults—many of whom experience barriers to employment—offers job-readiness training and work-based experience in retail and practical trade skills.

Library of the Built Environment—Over the years Historic Ithaca has amassed a sizeable collection of books, maps, and photographs. The move to the Center Street headquarters has allowed for suitable space to house these resources. Historic Ithaca’s volunteers have worked diligently to organize a valuable research facility for homeowners, residents, students, historians, and design professionals.

In conclusion, for nearly 50 years Historic Ithaca has engaged a broad constituency of area residents, local government, businesses, and organizations who recognize the rich history of our region's built environment. Its mission and programs support the belief that surviving historic elements of the built environment are living documents that reflect the social attitudes, aspirations, and economic realities of our neighborhoods, downtowns, and rural landscapes over time. The organization continues to engage with the community, demonstrating by means of its programs and services that historic preservation is a benefit to the whole community and accessible to all.

III. Mission, Vision, and Values

Historic Ithaca Mission Statement

To promote the value and enhancement of our historic buildings and neighborhoods to the city of Ithaca and Tompkins County through education, advocacy and action

Values: Principles and Beliefs that Guide Mission Fulfillment

- Historic places contribute significantly to the quality of life and economic vitality we enjoy in Tompkins County and the Finger Lakes region.
- As Ithaca and Tompkins County grow in population, new development should be sensitive to existing historic resources
- Historic preservation is an inherently “green” practice and should be embraced as a cornerstone of community sustainability.
- Historic preservation is valuable and should be accessible to all members of the community.

Vision

For Tompkins County to be a place where historic places are valued and preserved by all

IV. Themes

Themes link Historic Ithaca's mission to the strategic plan as follows:

- **Education:** Offer a range of educational programs and events related to the built environment, such as local and regional architectural history and traditional building and crafts
- **Advocacy:** Promote public awareness and support citizen and legislative action to preserve historic resources and other elements that contribute to the historic character of the built environment

- **Action:** Initiate programs, events, and projects that actively promote, preserve, and protect architectural and cultural heritage and that result in community-wide social, environmental, and economic benefits
- **Organizational sustainability:** Operate and govern Historic Ithaca in ways that are economically sustainable, including board and staff development, financial accounting, and documented procedures and programs

V. Focus Areas

Historic Ithaca's programs fall into one of two focus areas:

1) Historic Preservation:

Preservation Services
Community Engagement

2) Community Development:

Significant Elements
Work Preserve

VI. Programs

Historic Ithaca's programs advance and promote our two central focus areas and further our mission. Please note that the order of objectives and strategies does not reflect a priority listing.

A. PRESERVATION SERVICES

1. **GOAL:** Offer professional expertise and resources about historic preservation and serve as a proactive advocate for the city and county's built environment
2. **AUDIENCE:** homeowners, neighborhoods, citizens, local and state officials, tradespeople and other professionals allied to construction and development, HI staff, students, researchers, Work Preserve participants
3. **OBJECTIVES:**
 - a. Strengthen Historic Ithaca as the voice for historic preservation in Ithaca and Tompkins County
 - b. Maintain a preservation services position that meets National Park Service professional qualifications standards in architectural history
 - c. Increase use of preservation services by a broader range of the public
 - d. Increase the organization's knowledge base by providing staff with professional training opportunities
 - e. Assess community needs and tailor services appropriately
 - f. Acquire, organize, and make accessible specialized written and other materials supporting all programs and a broad range of related interests such as architectural history, traditional building trades, urban planning, local history, and historic landscapes

4. STRATEGIES:

- a. Mobilize the Advocacy Committee and staff to develop a plan to advocate effectively for preservation in the city and county
- b. Identify training opportunities to support and enhance HI's projects, programs, and services for our community
- c. Identify opportunities to promote fee-based preservation services such as cultural resource surveys; building assessments; and advice on or preparation of local, state, or National Register nominations
- d. Identify and plan potential special projects, such as the Historic Millwork conference, photography exhibits, and unique research exhibits
- e. Expand and improve the collection and management of the Library of the Built Environment
- f. Identify stakeholders. Survey and reach out to stakeholders to discern preservation services needs (Ex. realtors, architects, tradespeople, green energy companies, etc.)

B. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 1. **GOAL:** Develop public awareness and appreciation for the built environment, including its context, history, and cultural legacy
- 2. **AUDIENCE:** residents, school children, youth and young adults, academics, contractors and trades people, local officials, Historic Ithaca's volunteers, visitors to the community
- 3. **OBJECTIVES:**
 - a. Offer educational programs and events—from introductory-level to specialized preservation skills—to develop preservation knowledge and skills for audiences in Ithaca and in the county's towns, villages, and hamlets.
 - b. Develop and maintain a strong network of supporters, volunteers, and community partners
- 4. **STRATEGIES:**
 - a. Develop a two-year schedule of public programs—including ongoing annual programs such as house tours, preservation workshops and book talks with broad public appeal—as well as periodic special events, such as the 2015 regional traditional millwork conference, a brew pub crawl, or bike tour of barns
 - b. Host an Old House Fair in 2016 as part of Historic Ithaca's 50th anniversary program
 - c. Create and implement a youth curriculum that builds awareness of the local historic built environment
 - d. Conduct annual audience assessment of community engagement activities
 - e. Identify opportunities to involve Work Preserve participants in community engagement activities

C. SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS

1. **GOAL:** Provide a community resource for historic preservation and building restoration by offering area residents and contractors the opportunity to purchase unique or period-appropriate building materials, furniture, and home accessories
2. **AUDIENCE:** homeowners, residents, students, contractors and tradespeople, landlords, Work Preserve participants, general public interested in environmental sustainability, design, furniture, antique dealers, tourists, and regional destination shoppers
3. **OBJECTIVES:**
 - a. Serve as a community resource for restoration and maintenance advice and tradespeople referrals
 - b. Divert usable materials from the local waste stream
 - c. Generate a revenue stream for Historic Ithaca
 - d. Provide the basis for Work Preserve training activities
4. **STRATEGIES:**
 - a. Develop a business plan
 - b. Offer interpretative displays of historic building materials
 - c. Implement Work Preserve training modules through store activities
 - d. Work with Preservation Services to develop tradespeople referral list and technical informational pamphlets
 - e. Enhance relationships with contractors and institutions to increase collection of re-useable building materials and partner with local organizations
 - f. Expand offerings of new products useful for the care and maintenance of older homes such as a tool-lending library

D. WORK PRESERVE

1. **GOAL:** Provide relevant employment training to local youth and young adults in the fields of traditional building and retail service at Significant Elements; educate participants about the history of the built environment through hands-on work
2. **AUDIENCE:** high school students, unemployed young adults, community, business and social services partners
3. **OBJECTIVES:**
 - a. Offer a range of training opportunities from job-readiness skills to trade apprenticeships
 - b. Improve employment opportunities for low-income community members
4. **STRATEGIES:**
 - a. Conduct program evaluation and develop a program plan

- b. Enhance outreach to community partners, including social service agencies and potential employers
- c. Develop partnerships with educational institutions such as BOCES, Ithaca High School, Lehman Alternative Community School, and TC3 to engage students who may be exploring careers or who are not college-bound
- d. Develop training modules for retail and traditional trade and crafts skills
- e. Consider offering fee-based youth programs, such as one-week summer camps focusing on building or traditional craft skills

VII. GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS:

1. **GOAL:** Develop and communicate clear procedures for the organization’s operations and governance, board and staff development, financial accounting and compliance requirements

2. **AUDIENCE:** staff; board members; volunteers; government agencies; Friends of Historic Ithaca; public, non-profit, and business partners; and funders

3. OBJECTIVES:

- a. Develop policies and procedures for board, staff, and volunteers
- b. Re-examine priorities, funding sources, and revenue to ensure the organization is properly staffed and adequately funded so that existing and new programs are economically sustainable
- c. Obtain more grants, gifts and corporate sponsorships
- d. Continue development of board capacity and diversity

4. STRATEGIES:

Board Governance and Capacity Development

- a. Establish ad-hoc committee to evaluate New York Council of Nonprofits’ (NYCON) review and proposed changes of existing by-laws and committee structure and ensure by-laws comply with New York State’s 2013 Nonprofit Revitalization Act
- b. Work with partnering agencies, such as the Human Services Coalition and NYCON, to evaluate and develop board capacity, procedures, strengths, training, and succession plan
- c. Maintain HI’s board member ratio to ensure HI’s standing as a Community Based Development Organization
- d. Develop a mission statement that reflects current and future activities

Community Outreach

- a. Consider opportunities to partner with or join other historic preservation and/or allied organizations, county historians, the History Center, PAST, PACNY, and the Preservation League of New York State
- b. Explore collaboration opportunities with or join other local/regional organizations to help further HI’s mission or strengthen its role in the community, such as Sustainable Tompkins, Habitat for Humanity, Ithaca

Neighborhood Housing Services, Greenstar, Cornell University, Ithaca College, GIAC, Southside Community Center

Operations

- a. Develop a two-year budget projecting strategic plan recommendations
- b. Develop operations procedures, review operational expenses and insurance needs (risks, safety and liability), identifying opportunities to reduce costs and determine funding needs
- c. Create a facilities management plan to ensure that 210-212 Center Street receive cyclical maintenance and meet the organization's needs

Human Resources and Staff Development

- a. Establish ad hoc committee to develop and adopt a human resource policies and manual for staff and volunteer training; establish a two-year training plan
- b. Determine staffing needs to meet strategic plan's goals and objectives
- c. Seek funding for potential additional staff, such as a communication specialist, development manager, volunteer coordinator, finance/office manager, and Significant Elements store clerk

Fundraising and Resource Development

- a. Develop fundraising plan and manual
- b. Establish targets for increasing "Friends of Historic Ithaca"
- c. Develop and implement major gifts campaign
- d. With Development committee, research fundraising management software and make recommendation for upgrade

Communications

- a. Develop communications plan to improve and upgrade communications vehicles (web sites, social media, print, ads)
- b. Develop marketing plans for programs and capitalize on upcoming 50th anniversary to elevate Historic Ithaca's profile in the community
- c. Market Historic Ithaca as the "one-stop shopping" resource for preservation services in Ithaca and Tompkins County and our region's leading voice for historic preservation