



# WISCONSIN CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
COMMISSIONS REPORT 2019



WISCONSIN  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY





**This study was funded through the generous support of the Jeffris Family Foundation**



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**I'm a strong believer in preservation ordinances. The stronger the preservation ordinance, the higher the property values, creating a better quality of life.”**

**TOM JEFFRIS**

**H**istoric Preservation and Wisconsin's historic preservation commissions add value to communities. Historic Preservation improves our quality of life, reinvigorates our neighborhoods, and is what gives our communities each their own distinctive character. It celebrates the places that are important to us, and identifies the places that tell our history.

This is the first comprehensive look at the work of the commissions and their accomplishments in Wisconsin. The project examined the scope of landmark designations, the number of reviews, the rates of customer satisfaction, and documented successful commission projects.

The results of this data are included in this report. The study quantifies the work of commissions, helps us understand how historic preservation commissions function across the state, identifies issues of concern to applicants, and provides key issues for future commission training.

### What is a Certified Local Government (CLG)?

A Certified Local Government (CLG) is any city, village, county, or town that has been certified by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Department of the Interior to meet these basic criteria:

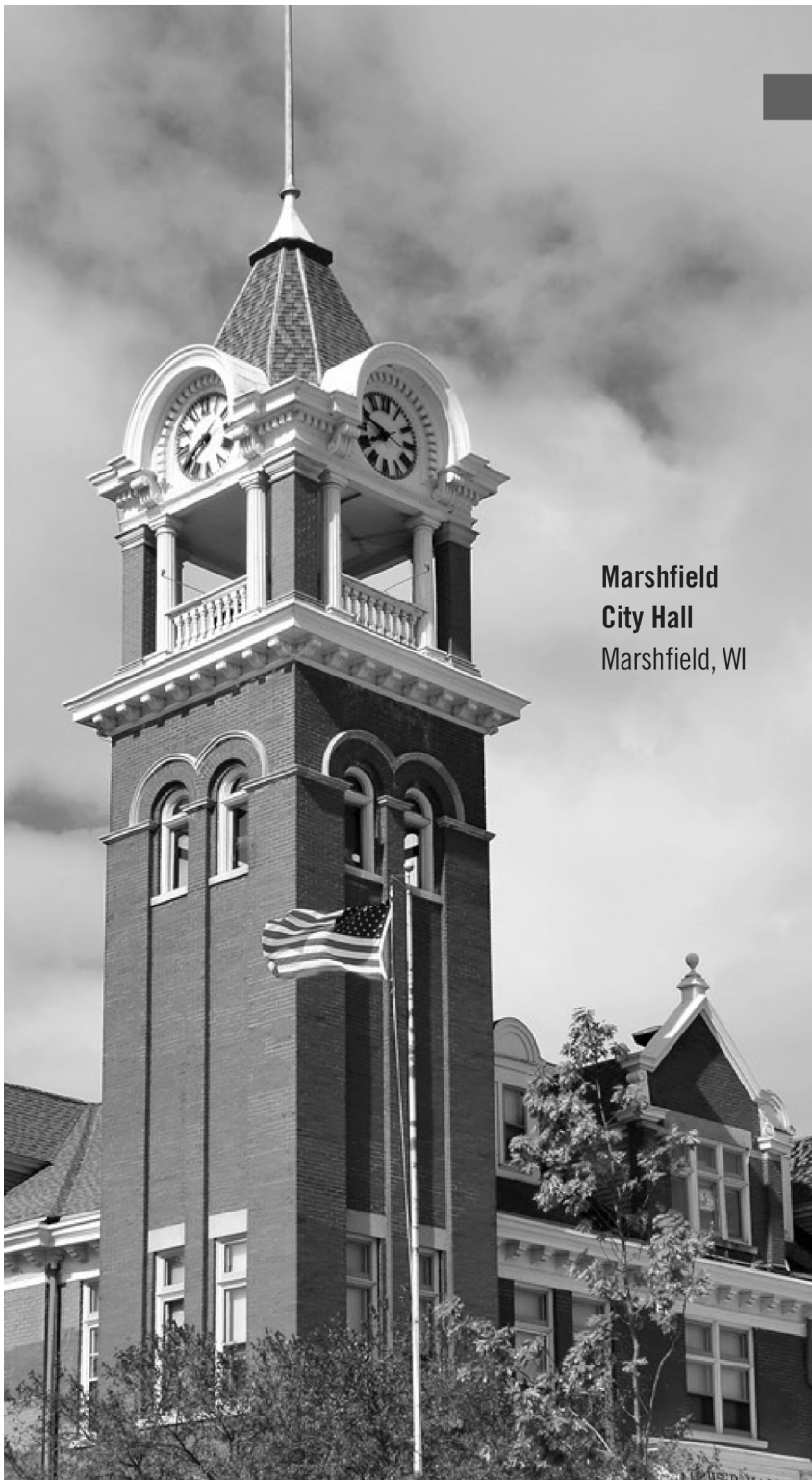
- ▶ Establish by ordinance a qualified historic preservation commission
- ▶ Enforce appropriate state or local legislation for the designation and protection of historic properties
- ▶ Maintain a system for the survey and inventory of local historic resources
- ▶ Provide for public participation in the local historic preservation program

### Wisconsin Requirements for Certified Local Governments

Federal law allows the state to establish additional requirements for CLGs. The CLG must adhere to all of the federal and state requirements or the SHPO may revoke the CLG certification. The Wisconsin SHPO has established these additional requirements:

- 1 The CLG must enact and enforce a historic preservation ordinance that regulates historic property.
- 2 A CLG must provide annual reporting to the SHPO on CLG activities.
- 3 A CLG must send copies of meeting minutes and agendas to the SHPO following each meeting.
- 4 The ordinance must not allow historic property owners to opt-out of local historic designation.
- 5 Designation must not require owner consent.
- 6 The commission must approve work on locally designated properties and recommendations may not be advisory.





**Marshfield  
City Hall**  
Marshfield, WI

### **What is a Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)?**

The governmental entity responsible for overseeing design review in a municipality's locally designated districts. This term is synonymous with Design Review Board, Board of Architectural Review, and other similar designations. Wisconsin Act 176 requires that all decisions of the HPC have an appeal process for the property owner. These appeals typically go before the city council, town board or county board depending on which jurisdiction is covered by the ordinance.

### **How are Historic Preservation Commissions funded?**

Commissions generally receive a small amount of funding from their local government. Since 1985, CLGs are eligible to apply for competitive Historic Preservation Subgrants from the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office to conduct historic preservation surveys, nominate properties to the National Register of Historic Places, create educational projects, and draft municipal preservation plans. Each year, several communities receive grants up to \$25,000 for a total of approximately \$100,000 awarded to subgrant projects. In just the past ten years of this program, the State Historic Preservation Office granted \$984,598 to 37 different CLGs.

### **What is a Landmark?**

A building, structure, object, or site identified under the guidelines of the local historic preservation ordinance as a historic resource of particular significance.

### **What is a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)?**

A document issued by a Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) that allows an applicant to proceed with a proposed alteration, demolition, or new construction in a designated area or site on a designated local landmark, following a determination of the proposal's suitability according to applicable criteria.

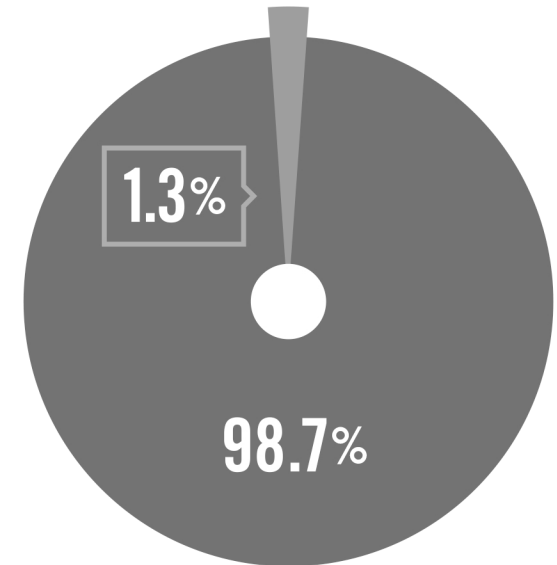
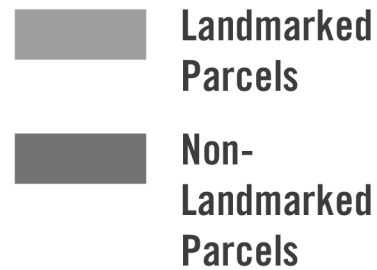
The State Historic Preservation Office contracted with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center to collect data. The then 70 CLG communities were contacted for the collection of statistical data, 56 responded. The Survey Center also distributed customer satisfaction surveys to property owners who had applied to CLGs for Certificates of Appropriateness (COAs) between July 2015 and fall of 2018. Two years of applicants from Milwaukee and Madison also received a survey. A total of 206 COA applicants responded.

Washburn  
Cultural Center  
Washburn, WI

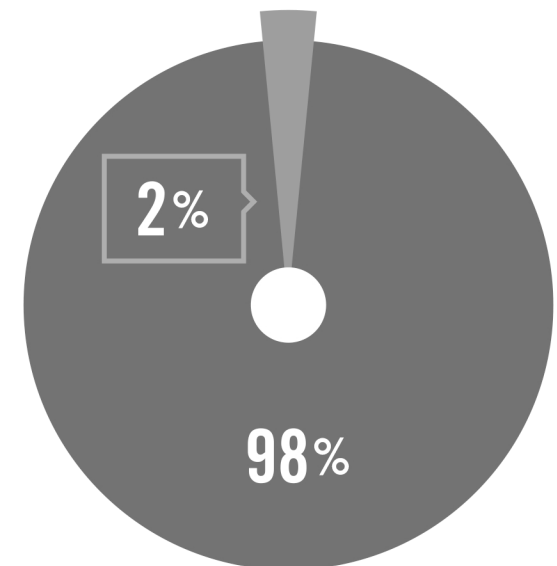
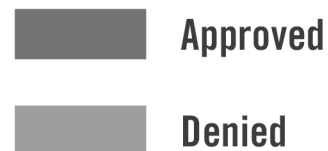


## STATEWIDE STATISTICS

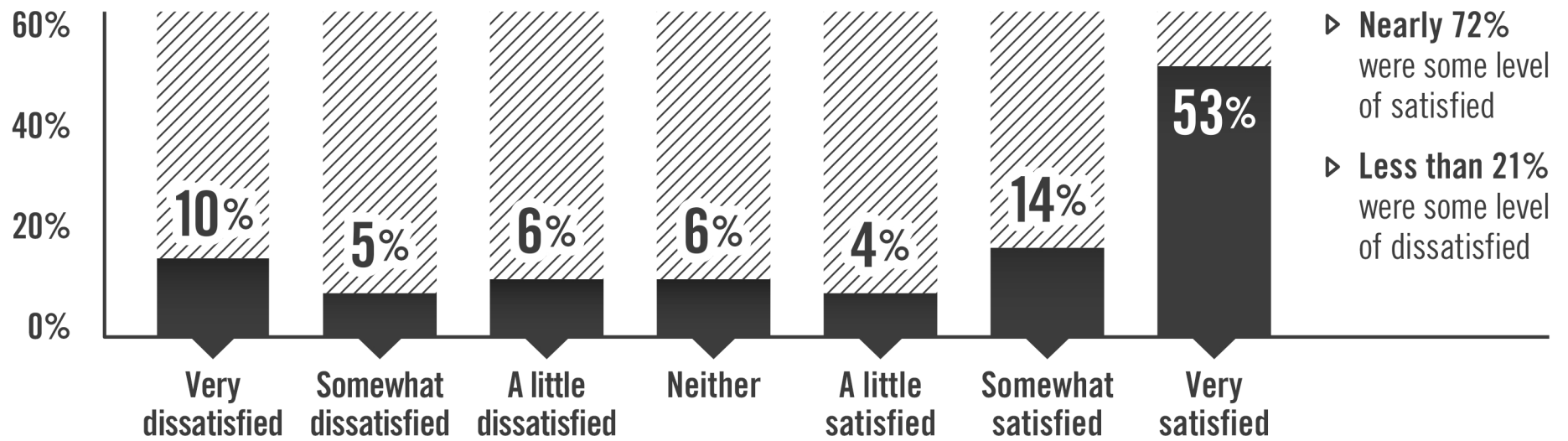
### % OF LANDMARKED PARCELS IN CLG COMMUNITIES



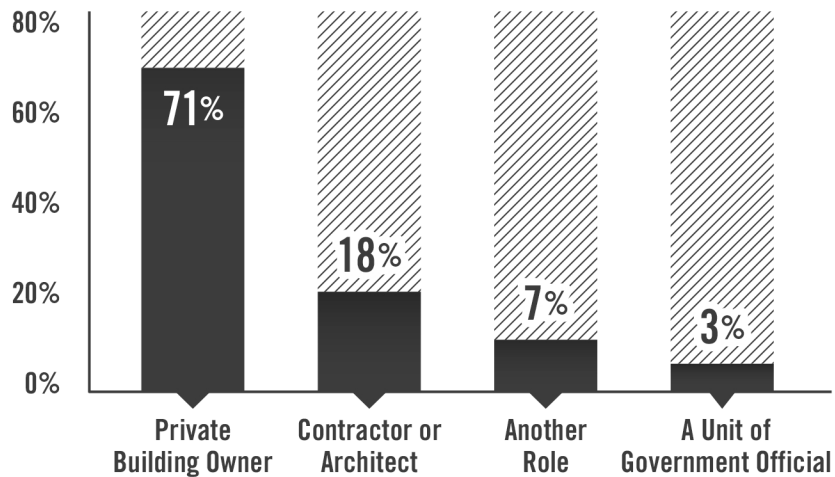
### COA APPROVAL



## APPLICANT SATISFACTION

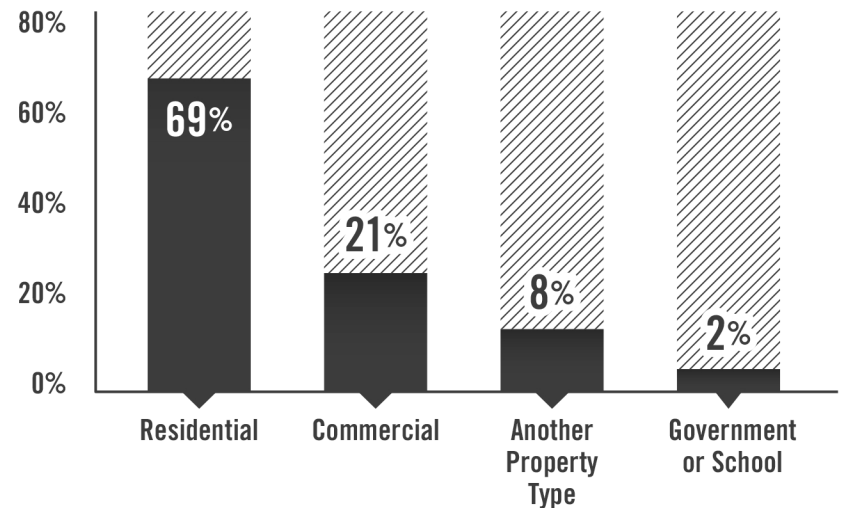


## WHO APPLIED FOR COAs?



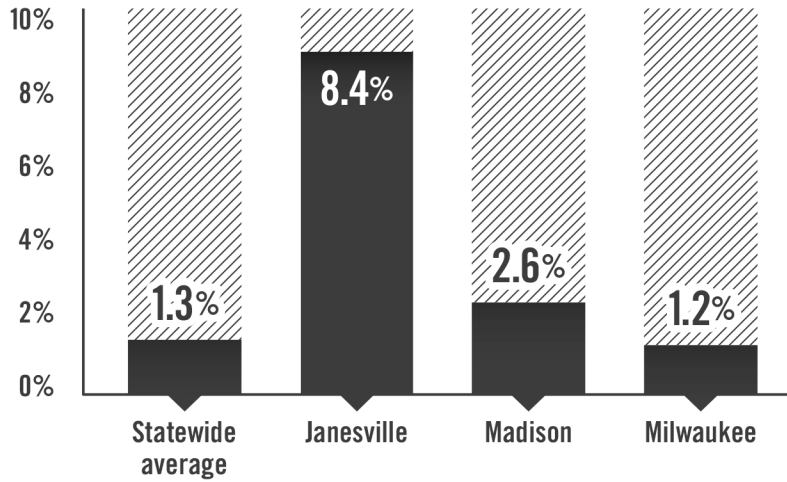
Between 2015 and 2018, on average, **918 COA applications** were reviewed statewide per year.

## TYPES OF COA PROJECTS

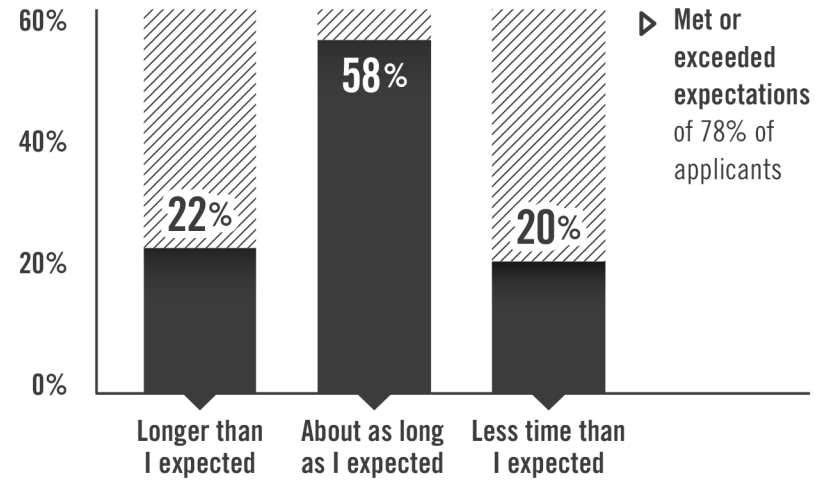


The majority of projects reviewed were residential.

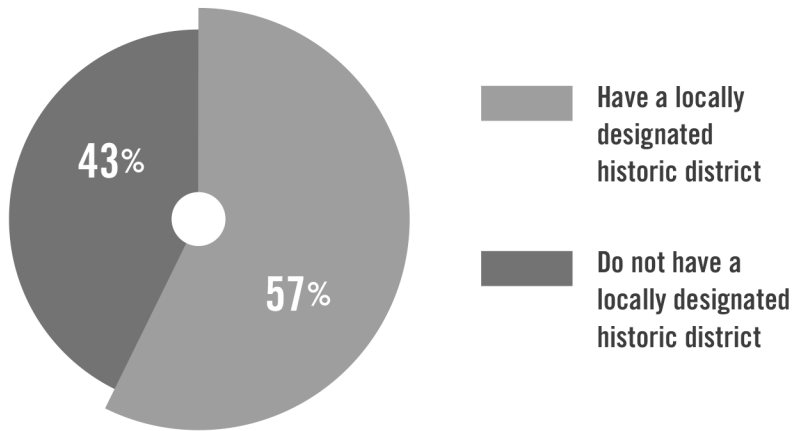
### CLG'S WITH THE HIGHEST % OF LANDMARKED PARCELS



### HPC REVIEW TIME OF COAs



### % OF REPORTING COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE A LOCALLY DESIGNATED HISTORIC DISTRICT



The average number of districts per community is **1.6**. Only Janesville, Madison, Milwaukee, and Waukesha reported more than three districts.

### # OF INDIVIDUAL LANDMARKS PER COMMUNITY

- ▷ **4** communities had **over 100** individual landmarks
- ▷ **7** communities had **between 50 and 99**
- ▷ **38** communities had **fewer than 50**
- ▷ **3** communities had **no individual landmarks**
- ▷ **4** communities **did not respond** to the question

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ 72% of COA applicants were satisfied with the process.
- ▶ From 2015 to 2018, a little more than 98% of COAs were approved.
- ▶ Just 1.3% of parcels were locally landmarked in reporting communities.
- ▶ Some applicants reported the need for clearer guidelines for their projects and better communication from their HPCs.

**Left:** Thomas H. Spence house in La Crosse.

**Bottom middle:** James Barber house in Eau Claire.

**Bottom right:** Frederick and Mary Woltersdorf house in Eau Claire.





# CASE STUDIES



## CHALET OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE

Historic Preservation Commissions provide technical expertise to historic property owners. The Chalet of the Golden Fleece is a local landmark in New Glarus and a heritage tourism destination. This building was constructed for Edwin P. Barlow as his home in 1938. Mr. Barlow is known for founding the annual New Glarus festival commemorating Wilhelm Tell. The building now serves as a museum of Swiss culture. It was added to the State and the National Register of Historic Places in 2015. Sandy Blum, Chair of the Friends of the Chalet of the Golden Fleece Museum, had this to say about her experience in working with the New Glarus Historic Preservation Commission: “I have had several interactions with our local Historic Preservation Commission. They have helped us with matters such as roof replacement, eave replacements and porch replacements. They have helped us to ensure the Chalet is repaired and maintained in a historically correct fashion. They have given us guidance in everything from materials to workmanship. As our volunteer group is mostly a collection of good hearted citizens with no or minimal background in historic properties, having the Preservation Commission to consult with has truly been a plus!”





## NEW RICHMOND DOWNTOWN FAÇADE GRANT PROGRAM

Local units of government look to Historic Preservation Commissions to provide expert review of work funded by the local government. In the city of New Richmond, the Historic Preservation Commission plays an active role in promoting the preservation and restoration of the downtown commercial buildings, which date back to the early 20th century. The municipal government provides an annual amount for downtown façade grants which require a match by the private business owner. The Historic Preservation Commission reviews the project applications, including renderings and descriptions of the proposed work. The Commission references their downtown design guidelines and offers feedback to the businesses when necessary to improve their projects. Ultimately the Commission chooses to approve funding, up to \$5,000 per applicant. Grant recipients must complete the project within one year. The city of New Richmond highlights the progress of the project with before and after photos on social media to bring recognition to the project. In the past two years, the Commission has awarded nearly \$40,000 which has incentivized an additional \$185,000 in private investment.



## OSHKOSH HISTORIC PLAQUE PROGRAM

The city of Oshkosh has many historically significant residential, commercial, and institutional buildings. To recognize these properties in the present and their place in their collective past, the Oshkosh Landmarks Commission instituted a Historic Plaque Program to share the history of these buildings and the community. The Commission conducts research and reviews applications for plaques based on established criteria as well as facilitates purchase of approved plaques for designated buildings. Property owners at 1703 Michigan Street, the D.C. Buckstaff Residence, the Arnold-Cummings House, ten properties on North Main Street, and properties on Washington Avenue have all received plaques.



## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION ASSISTS PROPERTY OWNER IN EVANSVILLE**

Local property owners take advantage of the expertise and professional connections established by Historic Preservation Commissions. Evansville is a small community with a rich collection of historic buildings in northwestern Rock County. In 1978, its downtown and the surrounding area were listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Building owner Paul Saevre has been working to restore a building in the historic downtown district. According to Mr. Saevre, “When we started this process a few months after purchasing the building, we knew we wanted to have the building look like it did in 1903 when it was built. The building inspector and economic development director got me in touch with ... the Historic Preservation Commission and how they could help.” The owner was grateful for the help and also for a Commission-led educational seminar. Ultimately Mr. Saevre hopes that the “building returns to being a valuable asset to the economic strength of the downtown Evansville district; much of this due to the help we have received from the Historic Preservation Commission.”



## **CITY OF GREEN BAY BECOMES WISCONSIN'S 73RD CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The city of Green Bay, Wisconsin's first and oldest city, became Wisconsin's newest Certified Local Government in May of 2019. This act marks a significant milestone in Green Bay's evolving view of the benefits of historic preservation. On the city's west side, two historic districts and a railroad passenger depot were added to the National Register of Historic Places. This area then benefitted from a surge in investment and found a new social vibrancy. At the same time, on the city's east side, the urban renewal of the 1960s and 70s continued to lose appeal. Interest in both new investment and historic preservation began to take root on the city's east side after the closing of the Port Plaza Mall. The listing of the Hotel Northland and the Green Bay YMCA on the National Register sparked significant investment and benefitted from state and federal preservation tax credits. Green Bay's CLG designation will help to address the preservation needs of the city, both with funding and technical assistance to nominate additional properties to the National Register of Historic Places and to bring additional economic, environmental, and social benefits of historic preservation to Green Bay.



## **FAÇADE GRANT PROGRAM RAISES PROPERTY VALUES IN STEVENS POINT**

In the city of Stevens Point, the Historic Preservation Commission approves applications for the city's façade grant program. This program has raised property values in downtown, improved the aesthetics, and enticed business and development. The property at 1055 Main Street is a great example of a transformed building that sat vacant for years. It was purchased locally and renovated significantly using both local façade grant dollars (\$90,000) and historic preservation tax credits. After renovation, an expanding company located in the second floor office suite and another local insurance company leased the entire first floor which allowed them to expand as well. Also on the second floor, the remaining two apartments are being updated for future downtown residents. All of this presentation activity has led to improved vitality in the downtown. More employees at these businesses are patronizing other small businesses downtown.



## **LAKESIDE PARK BECOMES A LOCAL LANDMARK IN FOND DU LAC**

Lakeside Park in Fond du Lac is 400 acres of public land with several historic features. One of those features is a bowstring arch bridge built circa 1890. This bridge had become hazardous for public use and was slated for replacement. The Historic Preservation Commission designated this resource as a local landmark. For the public to continue using the bridge, a full restoration would have to be undertaken, including guard rails that would detract from the architectural beauty of the bowstring arch design. After further research, it was found that other cities reuse bowstring arch bridges as bicycle paths and the Lakeside Park planning committee had bicycle paths as a priority. The city of Fond du Lac fully restored and repainted the bowstring arch with paint selection by the Historic Preservation Commission, and relocated it along the Fond du Lac Loop biking trail through Lakeside Park. A new bowstring arch replica with appropriate public guide rails is in its former location for safe public crossing, while the historic bowstring arch is situated by Deneveu Creek with many cyclists, walkers, and photographers enjoying its beauty and new use.



## **STOUGHTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION EXPANDS PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS**

The Stoughton Landmarks Commission initiated greater public outreach efforts in the community. Their goals are to educate the broader community about the benefits of historic preservation and why preserving buildings is critical to preserving the unique history of Stoughton, to explain how the Landmarks Commission is a source of restoration advice and information, and to reinforce that the Commission is an ally who works for the benefit of all residents.

To become more publicly accessible, the Commission started attending the local farmers market in downtown Stoughton. Recently, they participated in the Earth Day Expo in the downtown, helping to make the connection between historic preservation and sustainability. The goal is for the public to see that commissioners are neighbors and friends who serve the community.

Outreach specifically to owners of local landmarks began in earnest by coordinating “Meet-Up” events at the annual Syttende Mai Norwegian heritage festival, and initiating a mini-grant program to help owners with appropriate repairs to their landmark buildings.



## **LOCAL DESIGNATION HELPS MARKET PROPERTIES IN EAU CLAIRE**

Local businesses in the city of Eau Claire take advantage of the partnership developed between the Historic Preservation Commission and the UW-Eau Claire History Department. The owners of two properties converted into bed and breakfasts felt that local landmark designation would help in marketing their properties. The Historic Preservation Commission reviewed these designation requests which included detailed historical research completed by the UW-Eau Claire Public History class. This research identified people historically associated with the properties that the Commission determined merited local landmark designation.

# RESOURCES



## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION TRAINING** ▶ [wihist.org/hpc-training](http://wihist.org/hpc-training)

The Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office's Historic Preservation Commission Training is a comprehensive training for new commissioners as well as a reference site for experienced commissioners covering every aspect of commission operation and historic preservation.

## **WISCONSIN CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS** ▶ [wihist.org/CLG](http://wihist.org/CLG)

The Wisconsin SHPO provides training and assistance to CLGs as well as a competitive subgrant program to fund preservation projects in CLG communities.

## **THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF PRESERVATION COMMISSIONS** ▶ [napcommissions.org](http://napcommissions.org)

NAPC is a national membership organization that provides commissions with training, resources, mentoring, and a network of members to support commissions dealing with the same responsibilities and issues across the country.

## **WISCONSIN MAIN STREET PROGRAM** ▶ [wedc.org/programs-and-resources/main-street](http://wedc.org/programs-and-resources/main-street)

The Main Street Program at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation provides expertise in downtown planning, management and development to communities looking to preserve and revitalize their downtown business district.

## **STATE AND NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES** ▶ [wihist.org/NR-FAQ](http://wihist.org/NR-FAQ)

The State and National Registers recognize historic sites, buildings, structures, objects and districts that have been determined to be significant in local, state, or national history.

## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION TAX CREDITS** ▶ [wihist.org/HP-TC](http://wihist.org/HP-TC)

The Wisconsin SHPO also administers the historic preservation tax credit program in Wisconsin. Owners of buildings eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places may apply for preservation tax credits for qualifying rehabilitation projects.

## **HOW TO PRESERVE YOUR HISTORIC BUILDING** ▶ [wihist.org/preserve-your-building](http://wihist.org/preserve-your-building)

This collection of articles, written by preservation professionals, provides owners with best practices for restoring and rehabilitating historic buildings.

## **HUMAN BURIALS, MOUNDS, AND CEMETERIES** ▶ [wihist.org/burials](http://wihist.org/burials)

Learn about the state and federal laws that protect burial sites, Native American mounds, and other places where human remains are buried.

To get a copy of this report visit [wisconsinhistory.org/CLG-report](http://wisconsinhistory.org/CLG-report)

**Left:** Kimberly Point Lighthouse in Neenah.



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