



21 May 2024

HFFI Advocacy Report to City Council (5/28/24)

This being Historic Preservation Month, HFFI's Board of Directors thought it appropriate to lay out some important goals for Preservation at the local level in the coming year. By May 2025, we hope to report that these goals have been met.

- 1. Establish a Preservation Advisory Committee**—The City's Preservation Plan, adopted in 2021, calls for creating two committees with a preservation focus. The first is a steering committee to implement an economic strategy that invests in the preservation of existing building stock. The second is a standing advisory committee to refresh the discourse about preservation and build support for preservation culture across the city.

During its work session on September 12, 2023, Preservation Planning staff proposed that Council create a Preservation Advisory Committee to provide resources, expertise, and focus to carry out several City preservation goals. HFFI will work with the City to provide this needed support and network with professional preservationists in the community to accomplish the goals of this committee.

- 2. Complete a Historic Preservation Economic Impact Study**—It is important that the community and its leaders are aware of the significant and far-reaching economic impacts generated by the preservation of the City's historic character and diverse built environment as well as how those impacts benefit city residents directly and indirectly. Last summer, the National Park Service released an economic impact study of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park that found its visitors spent \$49.9 million in surrounding communities in 2022 alone.

A historic preservation economic impact study has been a top goal for City Council and staff since 2021. It is listed in the Preservation Plan (Chapter 8 of the Comprehensive Plan), has appeared on Council's 3-year Priority Task List, and was recommended as recently as June 2023 in the expert "Preservation Recommendations" study commissioned to support the City's Preservation program.

Funding for this study was presented by City staff and requested by the Planning Commission last fall but failed to make the FY2025 budget. This kind of study is long overdue and sorely needed. HFFI will work with City staff, the EDA, EDT, Main Street, Chamber of Commerce, and any other organizations or institutions to make this longstanding goal come to fruition. We hope we can count on City Council's support in the future.

- 3. Implement Incentives for Preservation**—Daniel Becker's expert Recommendations report, completed in June 2023, outlined several potential incentives to fulfill one of City Council's

priority goals for Historic Preservation. The EDA and Council were briefed on this study last summer. We will work with the city to implement those recommendations.

- 4. Implement the 2012 MOU between the City and HFFI**—In 2012, a Memorandum of Understanding was established between the City and HFFI following years of proactive discussion and collaboration to improve the community’s response to decaying and blighted buildings. Several of the tasks and goals detailed in the 2012 MOU were reiterated in the June 2023 report on Economic Incentives and Prevention of Spot Blight and Demolition by Neglect.

In the next year, HFFI will work toward implementing some of the tasks outlined in the MOU and Preservation Recommendations report to assist property owners in and around Fredericksburg’s historic downtown core that are affected by blighted resources. We will coordinate with City Planning and Public Works staff in our efforts and work together to improve and expand the community’s response to preserving our existing building stock, especially its residential resources. HFFI hopes that increased outreach to property owners and technical support for property maintenance will help achieve the City’s goal to ensure demolitions become the option of last resort.

- 5. Preserve Neighborhood Character**—HFFI would like to engage in ongoing Planning staff and City Council discussions about Neighborhood Character Preservation, including the current dialog concerning Conservation District overlays/zoning. We share the desire to help protect the character of neighborhoods and to ensure housing options in the City.

- 6. Adopt Best Practices for City-Owned Historic Properties, including Renwick Courthouse Complex**—HFFI would like to see the Renwick Working Group continue to interact with City staff and meet at least quarterly to support its valuable and productive work in seeking to rehabilitate the Renwick Complex. This model of collaboration among different skill sets from the community looks to be the best chance for success.

Beyond our historic courthouse, the City oversees many cultural historic assets in the community that require sensitive and thoughtful approaches to their maintenance and repair. HFFI will continue to support the preservation of Fredericksburg’s unique and diverse historic resources above and below the ground surface, advocating for best practices called for in the City’s Preservation Plan to prevent their deterioration and destruction.

- 7. Assist staff in Various Departments in Identifying and Protecting FXBG’s Significant Cultural Historic Resources as Master Plans, Small Area Plans, and Comprehensive Planning Move Forward**—For nearly a century, Fredericksburg residents have invested in the preservation of the historic places and spaces that reveal our storied past and reinforce the cultural identity of the community. The civic pride distilled from preserving our history is visible and reiterated in every planning document intended to guide Fredericksburg’s growth and development since the twentieth century. In recent years, City staff has turned to hired consultants for assistance in steering future growth, many of whom are based outside the Fredericksburg area and consequently do not have the depth of historical awareness that local organizations and repositories possess.

Recent planning documents and presentations at public meetings have shown significant gaps and omissions regarding known archaeological sites and historic resources within the City. Greater awareness of cultural historic assets and previous professional preservation studies is important to avoid the unnecessary destruction of such resources along with any valuable information they could reveal. HFFI wants to work with various department staff to fill those gaps in planning for growth and support the City's goal to preserve significant historic resources and protect archaeological sites across the community moving forward.

HFFI's Board of Directors and staff appreciate your time and consideration of these matters. We hope that the next year will bear witness to the successful completion of longstanding Preservation goals in Fredericksburg. To ensure their completion, we will need your help and support. If you share these goals and have the time, interest, and any expertise to help achieve them, please contact Danae Peckler, HFFI's Preservationist and SOI-qualified Architectural Historian at preservationist@hffi.org