

Some General Principles

This handbook discusses a whole range of issues which relate to historic preservation in the Town of Bennington, from history and architectural styles to remodeling, demolition, new construction, and archeology. Ultimately the subject goes beyond buildings and streets to something larger: the quality of life in Bennington.

It is important to keep this in mind when reading any part of this handbook and when thinking about any of the matters it discusses. The idea of historic preservation in Bennington is based on the fact that past and present are both a part of real life. In this book, each issue is discussed and each street and building is studied with three basic ideas in mind. These ideas are true now and they were true in the past, every time a building has been built or changed in Bennington.



You've Got To Be Practical

Every building, new or old, is built to serve a purpose. If a building doesn't work, it misses the point. Historic preservation is meant to keep buildings working, not to make it harder for them to do so. Part of practicality is cost, and it is not the role of historic preservation to set standards nobody can afford. But the most practical way is more than just the cheapest way. The best buildings, and the best towns, are built by people who understand that practicality and quality cannot be separated.



You Can't Freeze Time

Historic preservation is not about stopping change. Some of the finest historic towns have buildings and streets from every period of their development, from the earliest times through the present day. Some of the finest historic buildings are not pure examples of one time or style, but have changes and additions which reflect continuing growth and use throughout their history. Responsible historic preservation encourages keeping good construction from every period. It encourages high-quality changes to existing buildings, and construction of high-quality new buildings where these will contribute to a town's ongoing growth and health.



There Are No Bad Guys

Historic preservation is a good cause, but it is not a battle. It recognizes that real people build towns, not just historians. When historic preservation works well, it is because a community acts to keep itself together and to improve itself. Every town has buildings and alterations which detract from its character as well as those which contribute to it. This handbook cites some examples of both, but it does so not to offer praise or blame. It does so to help people in Bennington to think more about what makes their town the place it is now, and what to do to make it the best place it can be in the future.

Photos: Bennington Free Library on Silver Street (top); 206 Pleasant Street (middle); The Putnam Hotel, Putnam Square (bottom).