Protect and Preserve the Historic Places That Matter to You
Author’s Note

This publication was originally intended to be an update of Preservation Pennsylvania’s 1998 Crisis Handbook: A Guide to Community Action. But, after spending more than four years traveling around Pennsylvania providing technical assistance to those needing help with preservation projects, this seemed to me like an opportunity to not only tell people what to do in the event of a preservation crisis, but to talk about how to avoid them whenever possible. Having recently spent several days in workshops with Donovan Rypkema, I also wanted to fold in many of the valuable concepts and techniques provided in his Feasibility Assessment Manual for Reusing Historic Buildings. And while I was at it, I thought I’d do my best to address some common questions and use examples to illustrate some best practices and common pitfalls that I have seen here in Pennsylvania. I sincerely hope that the resulting document is useful to you as you work to protect and preserve the historic places that matter to you.

Sincerely,
Erin Hammerstedt

Section 1:
Understand the Problem and Build Support
See Section 2 document

Section 2:
Consider Alternatives and Use Appropriate Tools
See Section 3 document

Section 3:
Assess the Project’s Financial Feasibility
See Section 4 document

Conclusion

This project was supported by the National Park Service’s Challenge Cost Share Program. Points of view are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the position of the Department of the Interior.
Most likely, you are reading this manual because there is a historic property that you are concerned about and you want to do something to help protect or preserve it. In order to be effective, you need to understand what is really happening and why. Only when you have a firm grasp of what the real problem is can you effectively identify what tools might be available to encourage or require action, what resources are needed to utilize those tools, and how to go about doing so.

In order to fully understand the problem, you need to gather information. Begin by finding out who the owner is and what their needs and challenges are. Learn how others feel about the property or project. Although there is little you can do to change them, recognize that outside factors such as national economic trends or real estate market conditions may influence the project. Once you have this information, you can begin to build support for the project.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM OR THREAT
In any preservation project, the first thing you need to do is identify the threat or problem.

- Is the building or structure you are concerned about threatened with demolition?
- Is it underutilized or vacant, or being neglected and allowed to deteriorate?
- Are incompatible alterations proposed or being made?
- Is the setting or environment around the property changing in a manner that is harmful to the historic character of the property?
- Are you struggling to make ends meet and considering selling or repurposing your historic property?

To some extent, each of these problems requires a different approach to preservation. But in large part, the steps you will take to help preserve the property are the same and are described in the following pages.

REALITY CHECK – SAVING PLACES IS HARD WORK
Saving historic properties is a tremendous challenge. It can be done, but the best time to start a preservation project is before the property is threatened and the need is urgent. This guide generally discusses a path to be taken in preserving a historic property before it becomes a crisis.

If your problem is extremely urgent, it may be too late to make the save. Or, you may have to take drastic action, forgoing the recommended deliberative and public process, and jumping to legal tools like an injunction. Please contact your State Historic Preservation Office or your statewide or local preservation nonprofit for assistance.

URGENCY
The Dansbury Depot in East Stroudsburg, Pa. is an example of a historic building that was literally saved none too soon. The railroad depot had previously been rehabilitated for use as a restaurant, but it suffered from a fire and was closed and left to deteriorate. A developer became interested in acquiring the property to remove the station and build a new multi-story, mixed-use building in its place. The developer began to demolish the building, but a group of citizens rallied and filed an injunction that halted demolition. With incredible communication and advocacy, they raised funds to acquire the building, move it from its original site to a new location on the opposite side of the railroad tracks, and are now rehabilitating it.

Projects like this are extremely difficult; had the community mobilized to acquire the property sooner, they would have had a much easier time and saved a substantial amount of money.
COMMUNICATE WITH THE PROPERTY OWNER
In many cases, property owners are not doing what we think they should be doing with their historic property, and so we consider them to be the problem. Rather than vilify the property owner and assume their intentions are bad, speak with them to understand their needs and desires for the property. In most cases, you’ll find that they mean to do something with their property, but:
• they don’t recognize the property as historic or significant;
• they don’t know what to do;
• they don’t have (or aren’t willing to spend) the money to do what needs to be done;
• they don’t want the hassle of doing it; or
• doing the project is not within their risk tolerance.
Work with them to identify the issues that are keeping them from preserving the building, and target your efforts on helping them to overcome those specific problems.

Potential solutions might be to:
• provide technical assistance to help them know what steps they need to take to complete the project;
• help them find resources to help finance the project;
• manage the project for them;
• help them think the project through so that some of the uncertainty is eliminated, or modify it so that the return is higher and thus the risk more palatable; or
• help facilitate a change in ownership.

For a discussion of ownership alternatives, please see page 24.

RESOURCES
If you are the owner of a historic property and need to close it, please see Preservation Brief 31: Mothballing Historic Buildings at http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief31.htm for more information. This publication will provide the information you need to help ensure that you take the steps necessary to keep the building secure and stable while you work to find a new use or owner for the property.

REALITY CHECK
In all but the rarest of cases, the property owner drives what happens to their property. If the owner does not want to participate or relinquish ownership, and there are no tools in place to require action, the project may not be possible.

BALTHASER BUILDING, Hamburg, Pa.
In an attempt to get an important but underutilized downtown building back in use, Hamburg’s Our Town Foundation hosted a workshop to prepare feasibility assessments for the vacant Balthaser Building. They did so in cooperation with the owner, who recently inherited this historic building, which was built in 1885 as a variety store but has been vacant since the mid 1990’s.

At the beginning of the process, the owner wasn’t sure whether she wanted to sell the property since it is important to her family’s history and contains many personal memories and items of sentimental if not monetary value. By working with the study team to assess the potential uses, she concluded that she is ready to sell it. She determined that she needs to make enough money from the sale of the property to cover the inheritance taxes but is willing to establish a reasonable sale price in order to see the building serve the community by contributing to its economic vitality. Her one requirement is that the property retain the Balthaser name as a tribute to her family.
LEARN HOW OTHER PEOPLE FEEL

In order to be effective in preserving a historic property, it is important that you understand who is impacted by the problem and involve them in solving it. You probably have strong feelings about the property, or you would not be getting involved. But you need to remember that others may also have valid opinions and goals that differ from your own. In order to find a viable solution and build public support for the project, you need to make sure you have the right people involved throughout the process.

In addition to the property owner, the people that should be invited to participate include:

• adjacent property owners
• area business owners or neighbors
• current or potential tenants
• municipal representatives or officials
• community groups
• preservation or revitalization organizations

Because they are the ones that are impacted by the problem and will be affected by the project, their opinions count and their talents, energy and resources should not be overlooked.

Seek Common Ground

It is important that you make a real effort to find out how other people see the issue and, more importantly, why they see it the way they do. Listen to the people you don’t agree with as carefully as those you do agree with. You will likely find that while people’s thoughts regarding the best course of action for a particular project may vary, the underlying reasons behind those thoughts are aligned with the goals of others. Through deliberative dialogue, it may be possible to settle on goals and objectives that satisfy the needs of most, if not all, of the parties involved.

ENGAGING MEMBERS of the COMMUNITY ADDS VALUABLE RESOURCES

Carrying out a preservation project from start to finish will take a lot of time, energy and resources. So it is important that you recognize the talents of those around you and utilize their skills and energy effectively. This will help to ensure that you are able to complete the project, and will engage the community as well. Not everyone needs to be involved in every aspect of the project. You can use some people to help gather information and plan, others to communicate and network, and still others to do the physical work. Be creative and involve as many people as possible in the project, letting them offer whatever they can and do what they’re good at and enjoy. Be sure to establish a realistic timeline so that supporters do not get discouraged and lose their momentum during the project.

Boy Scouts and their families worked hard to prepare mortar and repoint the foundation of the Abington Meeting House in southeastern Pennsylvania as part of a larger project.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SHARED VISION

The citizens in Saltsburg, Pa., are united in their desire to help improve their community. Unfortunately, they have not laid the groundwork to ensure that everyone understands what type of improvement is appropriate in the historic district. As a result, the historic district is threatened by inappropriate changes.

A property owner began to improve their building by installing a stone veneer over an 1840’s brick building. They did so without the approval of the local historical and architectural review board (HARB). HARB reviewed the project after it was already started and concluded that the project was not appropriate since it resulted in changes to character-defining features of the building. Despite their recommendation, Borough Council permitted the project because they did not want to keep people from improving their properties.

All of the parties involved were taking action in an attempt to improve Saltsburg. Unfortunately, they were not all on the same page as to what constitutes an improvement, and thus, a historic building was irreversibly altered. An implementable master plan or local design guidelines are tools that may help communities avoid situations like this one.
ADDRESS PRESERVATION PERCEPTIONS
Many people don’t understand that historic preservation is simply about working to protect the places that matter to you. Some think that it is all about house museums, or telling them what they can and can’t do with their property, and that it is expensive or elitist. Quite likely, you will need to understand common local perceptions of preservation and help to educate the community about what preservation is and isn’t and how it can benefit them.

National Register of Historic Places
The National Register is the nation’s official list of historic places that have been deemed worthy of preservation. It is an important tool but is often misunderstood. Generally, listing in the National Register is an honorific designation, which can be useful in tourism and marketing, provides some level of protection from federally funded or licensed projects, and may be used to determine whether a project is eligible for grant funding, where and when grants are available. National Register listing does not regulate what private property owners can do with their property; only a local historic preservation ordinance can do that.

THE NATIONAL REGISTER
of HISTORIC PLACES

National Register Listing
DOES:
- Provide recognition of a property’s significance in history, architecture, engineering or archaeology.
- Make property owners eligible to buy a bronze plaque denoting this important designation.
- Serve as a tool for local planning, heritage tourism and heritage education.
- Provide some protection in the form of consideration and mitigation of adverse effects from federally funded or licensed projects.
- Provide the owner of income-producing properties the opportunity to receive federal tax credits of up to 20% of certified rehabilitation costs. (State tax credits may also be available).
- Provide the nonprofit owners the opportunity to apply for matching grant-in-aid funds for restoration or rehabilitation, when such funds are available.
- Allow the owner to receive technical assistance regarding the maintenance and rehabilitation of the historic property if they so desire.

National Register Listing
DOES NOT:
- Place obligations on private property owners or restrict the use, treatment, transfer or disposition of private property.
- Lead to public acquisition or require public access to the property.
- Require federal or state review of proposed alterations unless federal money is being used to fund the project.
- Automatically invoke local historic district zoning or local landmark designation that can put restrictions on private property.
- Require preservation (maintenance) or restoration of the property.
- Provide a historical marker for the property, although owners are eligible to purchase one through private vendors.

A property can only be listed in the National Register if the property owner consents to that designation.
A historic district cannot be listed if a majority of property owners objects to the designation.

For more information about the National Register, visit http://www.nps.gov/nr/.

REALITY CHECK
The National Register of Historic Places is not the only measure of whether a property is significant or worthy of preservation. Buildings that do not meet the National Register criteria may still be designated as historic locally, and many buildings with no designation can and should be preserved. See page 12 for more information on how to designate properties as historic.
RECOGNIZE OUTSIDE FACTORS

It is often relatively clear that factors directly related to the project, such as the intentions and resources of the property owner and the size and condition of the building, have a significant impact on whether a historic preservation project is successful. However, there are a number of other factors—those not directly related to the property itself—that may also affect the project.

Thus, it is important to consider:
• What economic factors and cultural trends might impact the project.
• What real estate and market factors will impact the project and its ability to be completed and sustained.

People often embark on a project with a specific concept or outcome in mind. But all too often, they do not look at the big picture to understand whether that idea or concept is indeed a viable one in the place and time the project occurs.

National Factors

Decisions of the federal government, such as whether its public policies and funding programs support historic preservation, have a significant impact on our ability to complete certain types of projects. So do national social trends, such as people’s desire to move out of or into urban areas. National economic conditions also play a role in preservation efforts: interest rates and the availability of financing are critical. And things like the price of gas impact the way people live, including where they choose to live, the types of vacations they take, etc.

All of these factors impact the viability of preservation projects. There is little that you can do to change these national factors to help your project, but you need to understand them in order to have a realistic vision of how your project will work.

Local and Regional Factors

It is important to understand regional and local factors that can impact the ability to complete and sustain preservation and rehabilitation projects. For example, is the population of the area increasing or decreasing? If it is decreasing, why? If it is increasing, who is coming? Is there job growth in the area? If so, in what economic sectors? Are there labor shortages or surpluses?

It is also important to understand how people in the area and region feel about projects like the one you are contemplating or conducting. Are they supportive of projects like this? Or are you facing an uphill battle? Do the people currently in the neighborhood have a historic connection to the property or are they newly arrived in the area?

Gather information about local and regional factors at the outset of a project. This information can often be found in municipal and county comprehensive plans, census data, and through conversations with local elected officials, residents, and business and property owners.

Real Estate Market Factors

Understanding local real estate market factors, including sales information, rent levels, vacancy levels and operating costs, among others, is also important. If a building is available for $500,000 but will only generate $10,000 per year in rental revenues, it is probably not a good investment. And in a market where a multi-unit apartment building is available for $30,000, it is unlikely that earning $1,000 per month for each of the six apartments in the building would be possible.

You also need to understand local financing factors, including the availability, rates, terms and conditions of loans, and the patterns of local lenders. And it is not wise to walk into a community or project without understanding the local supply and demand. What similar buildings, businesses or uses exist, and how are they supported by the community? Is there an opportunity to expand in that area, or is the market saturated?

For best results, take the time to gather this information before moving too far along in your project.

Connellsville, Pa.

Connellsville used to be known as the Coke Capital of the World, since it provided much of the fuel needed for Pittsburgh’s steel industry in the early 20th century. However, as the steel industry waned, jobs left Connellsville and the real estate market declined. Many people looked to strip mining as a source of income and used the under-valued real estate in Connellsville to secure bonds for their strip-mining operations. Many of the town’s property owners do not reside in Connellsville; some have never been there and never will. They purchased the buildings sight unseen, with no intention of using them for anything other than collateral for their mining bonds. This leaves Connellsville in a relatively unique and challenging situation as they try to rehabilitate their historic buildings and revitalize their community.
After gathering basic information, you now have an understanding of the problem. You know how people feel about the issue(s) and what outside factors might influence the project. So now, it is time to clarify what it is that you are trying to accomplish and define the goals and objectives for the project. That will allow you to communicate effectively and work to build support and advocate for your property, project or issue.

**DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

It is important that you consciously consider, understand, and can effectively communicate what it is that you are trying to accomplish by tackling this problem. Before you go any further, stop to make sure you understand how you feel about the problem and why.

By opposing the construction of a new chain retail store downtown, are you trying to prevent the demolition of a historic building, prevent inappropriate new construction that will detract from the character of a historic district, or protect existing merchants from a loss of business with the opening of a new retail establishment?

Are you fighting to preserve a historic bridge because you feel that the structure is significant and should not be lost, or because you fear that the new bridge will result in changes to traffic patterns that will disrupt the quality of life in the community?

**Define Clear Goals and Objectives**

A logical next step is to work with those that have a stake in the project to define goals and objectives. Goals are general or broad intentions. It is critical that you consider not only your goals and the goals of those that agree with your ideas, but the goals of all stakeholders with an interest in the project. Objectives are more specific outcomes or results that are desired. They are usually related to the overarching goals and are achieved through a series of action steps.

**What are the objectives of the property owner?**
- Do they want to sell the property?
- Do they want to do something to help their community?
- Do they want to preserve a family legacy?
- Do they need a place to house their business?
- Are they looking to generate consistent revenues or build equity?

**What are the objectives of a potential developer, investor or future owner?**
- Are they trying to do something to benefit or revitalize the community?
- Do they want tax credits?
- Do they need a certain rate of return on their investment?

**What are the objectives of involved third parties, such as the municipality, community revitalization organizations, preservation groups or neighbors?**
- Are there needs in the community that aren’t being met elsewhere?
- Do they have a need for a particular use, such as lodging, housing, retail or community services?
- Do they want to exclude certain uses?
- Do they need the property to generate tax revenues?

Consider the goals and objectives of everyone with a stake in the project and put them in writing for reference and use throughout the project.

**REALITY CHECK – CLEARLY STATE YOUR PURPOSE: MAKE THE CASE FOR SUPPORT**

Your project is more likely to be successful if you can clearly state not only that something should be preserved, but why, and what the impacts or benefits of doing so will be.
BUILD SUPPORT

Public support is important to any preservation project. So how do you build the case necessary to gain that support? First, present positive, well-researched testimony. Make sure you are making truthful and accurate statements. (For instance, don’t say something is what the community wants if you’d only heard from a handful of people). Use that testimony to generate positive media coverage. Continue to involve the public and local politicians, and keep them informed of your progress.

As explained above, an important first step in building support is providing well-researched testimony. It is important to listen to the public and understand their concerns. Listen not only to those who are making their opinions heard (the squeaky wheels), but try to engage others, as well. You need to be creative, and try to talk to them in a place and at a time when they are comfortable. They might not want to attend a public meeting but might be happy to talk with you while watching their children play at the park or waiting for the bus. If you do hold a public meeting, make sure you advertise it in languages and places that will reach a variety of citizens; and don’t underestimate the power of free food! Light snacks and treats make meetings more pleasant and improve attendance. If the voice of your resident curmudgeon is the only one people hear, they won’t take your issue or position seriously and may even be pushed the other way.

REALITY CHECK – EMBRACE OPPOSITION

One of the common denominators of successful rehabilitation projects is a healthy dose of public skepticism during the process. By questioning the project and its merits, opposition can actually strengthen a project by ensuring that alternatives have been considered and a compelling and well-reasoned case can be made for moving forward in the chosen direction. Instead of ignoring those with differing opinions or opposing goals, try to understand their point of view and anticipate their concerns so that you are prepared to address them. Your job is not to convince them that you are right or change their minds, but rather to provide factual information and illustrate for them how completing the project at hand can, indeed, address their concerns. Rather than make them feel like you think they are wrong, which will likely put them on the defensive and impel them to hold their ground, acknowledge their position and work together to find a solution that is satisfactory for everyone.

GATHER PUBLIC INPUT

The city of Connellsville, Pa. was preparing a preservation plan and wanted to know what issues and resources the community felt were important as a first step in defining goals and objectives and prioritizing preservation activities. They began with a walking tour of the community, viewing the town from a visitor’s perspective. They then met in small groups to discuss the issues they’d identified. Then each group reported back to the large group to develop common issues, themes and priorities. More than 60 people participated in this workshop, representing a diverse segment of the town’s population and interests. The steering committee for the preservation plan could not have identified these issues without real, meaningful public involvement.
COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Public relations and communication is a very important aspect of any successful preservation project. It is important that you develop a consistent, focused message that is relevant to your audience. Keep your message clear, free of preservation jargon, and focused on the positive goals you have developed. Explain to people what is at stake, why historic preservation is important, and how your success will positively affect them and the community. You will be more effective talking about the solution rather than focusing on the problem. Reiterate your purpose and key objectives in all forms of communication.

Prioritize your communications efforts. List your various audiences, including the public, elected officials and the media. Develop a communication strategy that is aligned with your goals, and allocate your time and money accordingly.

Tips for Communicating with the Media

Your efforts to communicate with the public and elected officials will be most successful if you develop and maintain good relationships with the media. Start by developing a database of media contacts, connecting directly with the pertinent editors and reporters. Keep in touch with them, and make a case for why they should cover your story for the sake of their audience, not your project. Understand the difference between support and coverage; don’t try to get the reporter to support your view, just get them to cover your story. Be concise. Convey necessary and interesting information without being long-winded, righteous or confusing. Always return calls from the media promptly. By treating the media with respect and honoring their deadlines, you will gain credibility as well as visibility for your cause.

Communication Tools

Depending on the level of organization and capacity of your group, you may have a website and/or newsletter. These are useful communication tools: the public can access them at will, and you can direct the media and elected officials to more information than you can include in their press releases and op-eds. If you have one, make sure your website is kept up to date, and monitor the information posted.

Press releases can be valuable communication tools. They should be on professional-looking letterhead, if possible, and should provide facts, not opinions. They should begin with a headline in large, bold type, followed by a dateline that includes the city and state in all capital letters, followed by the date. Write a strong lead paragraph that summarizes the release in just a couple of sentences, and includes who, what, where, when, why, how and how much, if relevant. The body of the press release should include paragraphs that support the lead and contain information that is accurate, brief and clear. Use statistics, dates and monetary figures, but avoid unnecessary information and opinions. Always include a name, phone number and email that can be used for further inquiries. Follow up to ensure that the media outlet received your press release.

The opinion and editorial section of the newspaper (op-eds) provides another opportunity to tell people about your project and what it stands for. Be concise and be clear about the message you are trying to convey. Back your statements up with numbers and statistics.

Depending on your audience and budget, radio and television may also be useful outlets for communication. The Internet is another powerful tool.

REALITY CHECK – SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

Social media is an essential form of communication today. If no one in your group is adept at using resources such as Facebook and Twitter, find someone more fluent in these and other communication tools and techniques that would be willing to lend their expertise. Not doing so would mean missing an opportunity to connect with a very large segment of the population, and could be detrimental to your efforts. You need to monitor what is said and make sure that the message conveyed supports your larger communication strategy.

CELEBRATE VICTORIES

There are many battles in every preservation war. In order to maintain the energy and optimism of your volunteers and partners, and to communicate your successes to the public, it is important that you take time to recognize your victories along the way.

RESOURCES

For more information on effective communications for preservation projects, please see:

• Effective Communications for Preservation Nonprofit Organizations, available through Amazon.com

• Communicating with Elected Officials, which can be found here: http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/public-policy/center-for-state-local-policy/additional-resources/cfslp-training-communicating-with-elected-officials-chapter.pdf
ADVOCATE AND LOBBY

Advocacy can be simply defined as active verbal support for a cause or position. The term grassroots refers to a movement that grows spontaneously and naturally, without encouragement from outside sources. Grassroots advocacy originates among concerned citizens and involves them taking collective action to support (or oppose) a cause or position. People can engage in grassroots advocacy on many levels, ranging from writing letters to their elected officials, organizing petitions to demonstrate support for a particular position or action, organizing workshops to educate and rally their community, and more. Communication in a variety of forms is a key component of most successful grassroots advocacy efforts. They often start with a particular reaction to a proposed action or contested position, and evolve over time as the issue becomes better understood and progress is made. When participating in a grassroots advocacy effort, don’t be against everything; be for something. Instead of just saying no and opposing other people’s plans, try to offer a solution or alternative.

EFFECTIVE GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

Faced with the closure of three elementary schools in their district, Mifflinburg area residents employed common grassroots advocacy strategies to generate support for their cause in the community and communicate to the school board that people value education in small schools and were willing to fight for what they believe in. The growing group came to be known by the school board as the “green shirts,” and their direct signs attracted the attention of the statewide preservation organization, which was able to provide technical assistance and connect them with additional resources.

ENGAGING YOUNG PRESERVATIONISTS

One way to understand how the community feels about a preservation project and engage them in the process as a means of building support is to talk about your project at local schools. If you are trying to find a reuse for a historic building, present the opportunity and have classes draw what they see for the future of the property. Children, if engaged, will take information home to their families.

TOOL: ENDANGERED PROPERTY LISTS

Endangered property lists exist on the national, state and local levels, and can be powerful tools to identify and draw attention to preservation issues and threats. These lists often arise from nominations made by the public, and serve as a useful tool to communicate with elected officials and the media. Some wish to be included on these lists because it can be used as a tool for fundraising. Some feel they have a negative connotation, and choose to highlight the preservation opportunities rather than focus on the threats.

The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh has an annual endangered properties list that they call Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area. The 2012 Top Ten list can be found here: http://www.youngpreservationists.org/ypa-releases-2012-top-ten-list.
Lobbying
Lobbying is letting your elected officials know what you want from them. It is the elected official’s duty to fairly represent his or her constituency, but it is the constituent’s responsibility to provide the information needed to make that possible. It is important to make logical arguments based on factual information and employ good communication skills to explain why preservation is important.

Lobbying can be used to affect change at any point in the legislative process. If you know where the bill is in the process, you can identify the appropriate legislators to talk to and express your support or concern. Utilize your avenues of communication, such as website, newsletter and social media to encourage your members, friends and community to lobby the appropriate elected officials, as well. Elected officials need to know how their constituents feel, but they can’t if you don’t tell them.

Be aware: there are limits on lobbying by nonprofit organizations and government employees. A preservation organization can lobby to persuade a representative to vote yes or no on an issue, but it cannot undertake activities to encourage votes for or against a political candidate. In some situations, hiring a professional lobbyist may be advisable.

The Legislative Process
In order to be successful in lobbying, it is important that you understand the legislative process. The process begins with an idea, which is turned into a bill and introduced by a member (or members) of Congress on the floor of the House or Senate. The bill is assigned a number, and then assigned to committee. Within that committee, a subcommittee reviews the legislation, amending it by introducing new elements or removing ones they do not support. The subcommittee then votes on the bill. If it passes, it goes to the full committee, who has the opportunity to make additional changes. If the committee then affirms the bill by a majority vote, it is then ready to go to the House or Senate floor for further action. Legislation can be amended again when it reaches the House and Senate floors.

Following approval on either floor of Congress, the bill is automatically sent to the other chamber, where it is similarly referred to committee and subcommittee. If both chambers pass identical versions of the bill, they go directly to the president (or governor) for signature. If the two versions differ, a conference committee is formed to discuss the points of difference. After the conference committee action is completed, both the House and Senate must take a final vote on the bill, which will go to the president if passed. The process can stretch over several months or even years. If a bill does not pass during a two-year term, it dies and must be reintroduced in the next legislative session.

MAINTAIN CREDIBILITY AND PROFESSIONALISM
One very important aspect of building support is establishing a sense of professionalism and maintaining credibility. Passion is an important ingredient in preservation projects; but if left unchecked, too much passion can make a person, organization or cause seem fanatical and unreasonable, and can drive potential supporters away. Make sure you don’t disregard established protocols and that you are open to other opinions and perspectives.

Whether they are elected officials, preservationists, code officials, contractors or bankers, recognize that the people that you encounter during the course of your project are professionals who have a lot of responsibilities in addition to the project that you are working on. It is important that you respect the established processes and do your best to conform to them. Remember, while you may be working on this project in your spare time in the evenings or on the weekends, they are most likely only thinking about this project during business hours. Send an email or leave a phone message, and then allow a reasonable amount of time for them to respond during business hours before contacting them again. Their time is valuable, so treat others involved in your project with the same respect and courtesy that you would expect from them.

If you are working with a group, establish a point person for communication with those outside of the group. Make sure that person represents the group well, and preferably that they can be contacted during business hours. The point person for communication does not need to be the same person that is actually leading the charge. Sometimes the internal leader is overly passionate and is not the best person to be speaking publicly.

RESOURCES
A Blueprint for Lobbying available through Amazon.com

REALITY CHECK – KEEP EMOTIONS IN CHECK
One of the key ingredients in every successful historic preservation project is an energetic and passionate champion. Projects need to be led by someone who cares and feels strongly enough to carry on even in the face of resistance. However, it is essential that that passion and energy be kept in check so that you can maintain your credibility and be taken seriously. Express your enthusiasm but do so in a way that is not offensive or overly dramatic or righteous.

A project’s designated speaker addresses the media rather than their passionate leader.
Conclusion

EVALUATE THE PROJECT
This four-part document was intended to provide you with information and tools that you may need to make informed decisions about your historic preservation project. Section 1 discussed the importance of understanding the problem and how to build support for your effort. Section 2 was intended to provide additional information about your building, and what your rehabilitation project will likely entail. Section 3 talked about the need to consider a wide range of alternatives for the historic property, and use appropriate tools to move the project forward. And, finally, Section 4 provided an overview of the financial considerations associated with historic preservation projects.

By now, you have defined the problem and understand how the community feels about it. You understand the building’s significance and condition, and recognize its cultural, environmental and economic value. You understand the requirements associated with making changes to its use, as well as the costs associated with doing so. You have assessed where the necessary funds will come from and have an idea of whether or not the new use will be sustainable.

So now you can make a responsible decision about whether to take on this preservation project. Is the building important to you? Is there a reasonable chance that you will be successful and able to sustain the project over time? If so, go for it!

Our goal is not to discourage you from embarking on a project, but rather to encourage you to think it all the way through before jumping in. In most cases, if there was an easy solution the project would already be done. The historic properties that need our help are those where there isn’t an easy answer. That doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t attempt the project. Just approach it in a logical manner, and think it through carefully. With some creativity and a lot of hard work, many preservation projects are accomplished every year.

Saving historic properties is often a slow process, and one that requires creativity and persistence. Don’t get discouraged if your project takes time. In fact, assume it will take at least twice (if not three times) as long as you think it should. While some properties are rehabilitated in just a year or two, it is not uncommon for projects led by individuals or volunteer-based organizations, among others, to take ten years or more. Realize that historic preservation is a marathon not a sprint, and pace yourself accordingly. For lengthy or phased projects, remember that cyclical maintenance and repairs may be required even before the project is complete.

Good luck with your historic preservation project. Don’t hesitate to reach out to your partners at your local and state preservation nonprofit, your State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service if you need help along the way.

Each year, Preservation Pennsylvania works with its partners to recognize preservation projects with awards. And each year we are stunned by how much good work is happening and the challenges that are being overcome along the way. Check with your state or local nonprofit or your State Historic Preservation Office to see if there are preservation awards in your area.

REALITY CHECK
Nothing is ever really “saved.” Ongoing maintenance is critical to sustaining historic properties. Vacancy and deferred maintenance commonly results in the endangerment of historic properties. Even some well-intentioned property owners are guilty of allowing demolition by neglect.