

## INTRODUCTION

Historic preservation has many advantages, but most of all, it makes good sense. Protecting older buildings in the commercial district and historic neighborhoods is a smart investment of time and money because these buildings and homes are aesthetically appealing, they are useful, and they help us understand ourselves as individuals and as a nation.

Historic districts, both residential and commercial, are the most visible indicator of community pride. They can either be an asset or a liability in the effort to recruit new residents, new businesses, and tourists to your community – and keep the ones you already have. Through their architecture, these historic buildings and homes tell the story of your community's history. Historic preservation is a way to pass on this legacy to future generations.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Historic preservation can sometimes be a contentious issue in small communities. There is a sense of “big brother” trying to tell property owners what they can and can’t do in maintaining and utilizing their historic properties. In reality, historic preservation can open many doors when it comes to participation in government-sponsored programs and in funding opportunities. The regulatory aspect of historic preservation is not intended to keep people from using historic buildings. On the contrary, the regulations are in place to ensure that future generations will get to use them as well. The recommendations that follow will allow Smithville residents to ensure that their past will remain a vital part of their future.

### ESTABLISH HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

A preservation ordinance protects historic properties by officially recognizing historic areas, buildings and sites as local historic districts and landmarks. Owners of these locally designated properties get approval from a locally appointed board for exterior changes, additions, new construction, relocation or demolition, so that changes complement the historic appearance of the building and its surroundings. Any restrictions put in place are comparable to the many zoning and housing subdivision regulations in place across the country. Big cities and small towns alike have found these laws to be an effective tool in protecting historic places from such undesirable fates as demolition for surface parking lots or deterioration through neglect.

#### Work with Owners in the Historic District to Determine Their Concerns and Issues

Form a task force or historic preservation steering committee by canvassing all the local stakeholders to determine who has interest in the future of Smithville’s historic areas. Include merchants, business owners, property owners, and residents. Contact the mayor and other local government officials, the city planning department, city economic

development officials, and other organizations, such as the chamber of commerce or merchants association.

Once a task force has been formed, determine the best way possible to obtain information about concerns and issues. What works best for one community might not be the best fit for yours. Suggested forms of information gathering are a written survey that is sent in the mail, face-to-face interviews, community forums or meetings, or smaller focus group meetings with people representing similar interests (e.g., residents of historic homes, property owners, business owners in the commercial district, etc.). Bring everyone possible to the table now. The wider the group of people who are included, the easier it is to get the information you need for the preservation ordinance build support for it later.

### Contact Texas Historical Commission for Input and Examples of Ordinances

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) has several programs that are specifically designed to help communities plan for historic preservation. Two of these programs will be especially helpful for Smithville as you move forward in this process – The Visionaries in Preservation and Certified Local Government programs are intended to provide you with the tools and resources to be successful in protecting your historic properties.

The Visionaries in Preservation program empowers communities to shape the future of their historic preservation efforts through visioning and planning, and provides training and assistance tailored to achieve local preservation goals. The Certified Local Government program helps cities and counties develop high standards of preservation to protect a wide range of important historic properties. The staff of these two THC programs is happy to share their expertise and resources on developing preservation ordinances.

For information on the resources available from these programs, contact the following THC staff:

- Visionaries in Preservation – Josh Lasserre, (512) 463-3345 or [josh.lasserre@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:josh.lasserre@thc.state.tx.us)
- Certified Local Government – Bratten Thomason, (512) 463-5997 or [bratten.thomason@thc.state.tx.us](mailto:bratten.thomason@thc.state.tx.us)

### Develop Ordinance that Protects Local Heritage without Being Onerous for Property Owners

Now that the concerns of local residents and business owners are known and you have received assistance from the Texas Historical Commission, you are ready to design the historic preservation ordinance. The task force could again be utilized by designing a draft ordinance to present to the Smithville City Council. The following steps are purely suggestions on items that could be included in the historic preservation ordinance:

1. Determine the area to be contained in the historic preservation ordinance. Will it apply to only certain properties or to entire historic districts?
2. Determine the types of skills or professions desired to be appointed members of the local Historic Preservation Commission.
3. Develop criteria for appropriate and allowable changes or additions to historic properties.

4. Determine the appropriate color palette that is indicative to the architectural style and historical period of the historic properties.
5. Approve or deny applications for Certificates of Appropriateness based on historic preservation standards and the goals and objective best suited to the Smithville community.

#### UTILIZE HISTORIC ASSETS IN ATTRACTING TOURISTS

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines cultural heritage tourism as traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources. The beauty of heritage tourism is that we don't necessarily have to travel far to find it. Texas has a wealth of history, heritage, and culture just waiting to be shared with the traveling public – and they want to learn about it.

According to a 2005 study called *Tourism Works for America* conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), 471 million Americans included a heritage and cultural activity in their travel plans during 2005. Heritage and cultural travelers also:

- Stay longer than non-heritage travelers (4.7 nights vs. 3.4 nights)
- Spend more money per day than non-heritage travelers (\$103/per day vs. \$81/per day)
- Pay for lodging more often than non-heritage travelers (62% vs. 56%), and
- Come back more often

There are many valuable resources available on developing heritage tourism programs. Not the least of which are those offered by the National Trust. They have developed five guiding principles that, if followed, will help to make your heritage tourism program a success:

1. Collaborate – Successful cultural heritage tourism programs bring together partners who may not have worked together in the past.
2. Find the Fit – Balancing the needs of residents and visitors is important to ensure that cultural heritage tourism benefits everyone. It is important to understand the kind and amount of tourism that your community can handle.
3. Make Sites and Programs Come Alive – Competition for time is fierce. To attract visitors, you must be sure that the destination is worth the drive.
4. Focus on Quality and Authenticity – Quality is an essential ingredient for all cultural heritage tourism, and authenticity is critical whenever heritage or history is involved.
5. Preserve and Protect – A community's cultural, historic, and natural resources are valuable and often irreplaceable.

As indicated in the statistics above, heritage tourism can have a tremendous economic impact on local economies. Obvious benefits can include new businesses, job growth, and higher property values. Heritage tourism can also add less tangible — but equally important — benefits such as quality of life for residents, and community pride.

Well-interpreted sites teach visitors their importance, and by extension, the importance of preserving other such sites elsewhere. Perhaps the biggest benefit of heritage

tourism is that it provides ways for a community to prosper economically while holding on to the characteristics that make it special.

When developing local heritage tourism sites and programs, remember that you don't have to reinvent the wheel. There are lots of good ideas out there just waiting to be repurposed to fit the situation in Smithville. Many good ideas and resources from other state governments, federal government departments, and organizations can be found at <http://culturalheritagetourism.org/CulturalHeritageToolkits.htm>. Other resources are housed on the THC's web site in the Heritage Trails program section at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/heritagetourism/htprogram.html>.

### Market Existing Historic Building Walking Tour

A walking tour of the local buildings with historical significance is a great way to share a part of Smithville's past with current visitors. Tours of this type can remind residents of the history inherent in your town - a history evidenced by the structures in which people lived, conducted business, worshiped, and learned. Visitors will be interested in this information as well. They want to learn how people just like them lived 50 or 100 years ago. Your job is to make it as simple as possible for visitors to find out about the tour, get information about it, and ultimately, want to participate in it.

The actual promotion of the walking tour must occur on two levels – 1) marketing of Smithville as an historic destination, and 2) marketing of Smithville's historic products once visitors have arrived.

Travelers who aren't already in town probably won't come to Smithville solely because you have a walking tour. The tour must be a part of the larger historic theme that is presented to the traveling public. Your historic assets should be included and emphasized in Smithville promotional materials that are distributed, or if funds allow, develop a brochure on Smithville's historical assets that can be used as a complement to the more comprehensive Smithville brochure or visitor guide. Using history, heritage, or culture to help you tell Smithville's story gives visitors more of a reason to come than just a walking tour alone.

Good venues for brochure distribution are in the regional chambers of commerce, visitor centers in larger towns that can feed you visitors (e.g., Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau), the Texas Department of Transportation's Travel Information Centers at major highway entry points around the state, and in the many travel shows geared toward attracting consumers to your town.

Once you have succeeded in getting the visitor to town, you can then engage in a variety of activities that could help promote the walking tour. Be sure to place the walking tour brochure/map in places that visitors would be likely to frequent. Examples include the chamber of commerce, popular restaurants, other attractions, gas stations, and convenience stores.

With attractions or other tourist-oriented local businesses, consider an "adopt an attraction" program. Rather than front line staff having to be well-versed on everything to see and do in town, attractions and businesses can be "adopted" by another attraction or business. The process is that one attraction adopts another until every attraction or tourism-related business in town has an attraction that can refer visitors to it when

they're in town. Staff need only know a few details about the adopted attraction and can effectively "sell" it to visitors.

Promotions are another good way to draw attention to a local asset. A historically-themed downtown event can include the walking tour as one of its activities to help build awareness in visitors. Even a sidewalk sale or a market day can go a long way in promoting the tour, especially if the merchants are housed in buildings that are included on the tour.

Do you have any ghost stories? The City of Round Rock has a tour called the "Round Rock Ghost Tours" which they promote as a way to discover the historical haunts of Round Rock. These tours in Round Rock and in many other towns are wildly popular, and thus, great ways of getting people interested and walking around in your community.

### Develop Additional Materials on Historic Assets

This goal can be achieved in three steps – 1) interpreting the historic asset(s), 2) determining the method of delivery, and 3) drawing upon Smithville's rich historical fabric. There may only be three steps, but a great deal of time and effort is contained within each one.

#### 1) Interpretation

People want more than simply to see interesting architecture, hear about the building's original use, or learn who built in/lived in it. That information is useful and should be included, but don't stop there. Today's traveler wants more than that – they want to be entertained and engaged. Thus, your tour has to tell them a story and it has to do so in a way that relates to them.

This is called interpretation. Rather than translating one language to another, this type of interpretation is defined as materials and activities that answer basic questions and provide information about a historic site, theme, or artifact. To help out with this, ask yourself a series of questions about the site or artifact. Use the six Ws and three Cs to help guide the discussion.

**WHAT** happened here? **WHO** did **WHAT** to **WHOM**? **WHERE**, exactly, did all this happen? **WHEN** did it happen? **WHY** did it happen and **WHY** should I care? Finally, **WHAT** resulted from **WHAT** happened here? The three Cs cover much the same ground. What are the **CAUSES** of the event(s) that happened here? What **CONSEQUENCES** occurred because of these event(s)? And, finally, what was the larger **CONTEXT** for these events? All history may be local, but there is a larger setting for everything. These are the basic questions you should be able to answer for every visitor to your site. Of all these, the most important question is, "Why should I care?".

#### 2) Delivery

Once you have determined what story to tell, the next step is to decide whether new tours or other products will be guided or self-guided. The information will be nearly the same, but its delivery will be structured very differently. Due to a finite amount of volunteers/staff, some guidelines for developing self-guided tours are presented.

Consider the following list of interpretive materials and guidelines, provided by the Texas Commission on the Arts, where staff and/or volunteers are not directly involved in communicating with visitors:

- After-hours displays (e.g., a kiosk, bulletin boards, exhibits and displays appropriate for outdoor settings, etc.)
- CD, cassette, or radio transmitted auto tours
- Printed publications, such as brochures, map tear sheets, etc.
- Interpretive signage

Most self-guided interpretation uses printed material. The effectiveness of these documents depends on the quality of their design, writing, and production.

Design for the audience.

- What are the audience's characteristics?
- How will the visitors use the materials?
- What conditions will the materials and the visitors be exposed to?

Use sharp and clear writing.

- Be brief and to the point. Focus on one idea per text unit. Text units should not exceed fifty words. Use subheadings to break the text into sections and to guide the reader.
- Use active verbs. Do not use jargon, but you should introduce and define new useful terms when appropriate.

### 3) Draw upon Smithville's historical fabric

Smithville has several themes that can be explored when developing new heritage tourism products. Dig deep into local archives, consult local historians, and peruse any local history books that may have been written about the history of Smithville as well as Bastrop County. Don't forget about tying the local history to the bigger picture.

Some thematic possibilities include the following ideas:

1. Smithville's association with the various railroad companies and lines that came through town, the depot building, and the railroad shops
2. History of the Buescher family and the State Park
3. Colorado River and how it has affected residents over the years (e.g., pre- and post- dams and Highland Lakes, etc.)
4. Gazley Creek and its importance to residents for fun and recreation
5. Local color – nothing is more interesting to people, than interesting people. Look at the popularity of the book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt. The book is full of local Savannah color and lore.



Whatever is decided upon, keep in mind the interpretive guidelines. Just because something is historical, doesn't automatically make it interesting or appealing to visitors. Tell the story and make it relevant to the traveler of today.

## **CONCLUSION**

Heritage tourism is a very viable tool to develop that can help attract visitors to town. As previously stated, heritage travelers tend to spend more money than other leisure travelers and stay longer per visit. These are good visitors to have in your town. By following the guidelines contained in this section, Smithville can make major strides in developing new products, improving existing ones, and telling your stories in an effective way so that you become an attractive destination for heritage tourists.