

ENGLEWOOD MASTER PLAN 2009

Historic Preservation

November 24, 2009

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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Englewood has a special feeling, a distinctive sense of place that residents and visitors alike associate with the city's historical architecture and landscapes. In its general outlines, the history of Englewood is typical of Bergen County. Dutch settlement and the Revolutionary War, the arrival of the railroad and opening of the George Washington Bridge: these events affected the entire region. Yet Englewood possesses an unusually rich and varied inventory of buildings that manifest this history.

In the last comprehensive countywide survey of historic sites, conducted in 1981

-82, three entire volumes were devoted to the city of Englewood, far more than any other city of comparable size. The stone houses from the late colonial period, the compact downtown that blossomed with the arrival of the railroad, the Victorian houses of the late nineteenth century in walking distance of the station, the East Hill estates built by Wall Street magnates, the smaller homes in the influential Dutch colonial revival style that Aymar Embury Jr. introduced in Englewood around 1910, Brookside Cemetery, and the impressive campus of Dwight Morrow High School opened in 1932, which, like the city's other school buildings of the early twentieth century, convey an inspiring vision of public education—these buildings and landscapes, among many other examples, embody

the history of our town. Without them, we would have no visible record of our connection with the past.

The importance of our historic heritage can be grasped by imagining what Englewood would feel like if all the buildings had been erected in a decade, as in the subdivisions that have sprouted elsewhere in Bergen County. Englewood's sense of place is an increasingly rare and highly prized quality in the suburban landscape. This invaluable asset springs from our historic built environment.

The historic buildings, streetscapes, and landscape settings that are found in all four wards, contribute to the town's identity and well-being in several ways. They create the beauty and visual appeal of the town. They foster local pride and a commitment to Englewood, which have been a hallmark of the town's civic culture. The historic heritage helps define the town's identity. Englewood's buildings span two centuries and establish a meaningful and authentic connection with the past. Finally, the historic character of residential neighborhoods strengthens property values.

Although we do not have data for Englewood, a substantial body of research demonstrates the economic benefits associated with a preservation effort. More specifically, studies have demonstrated

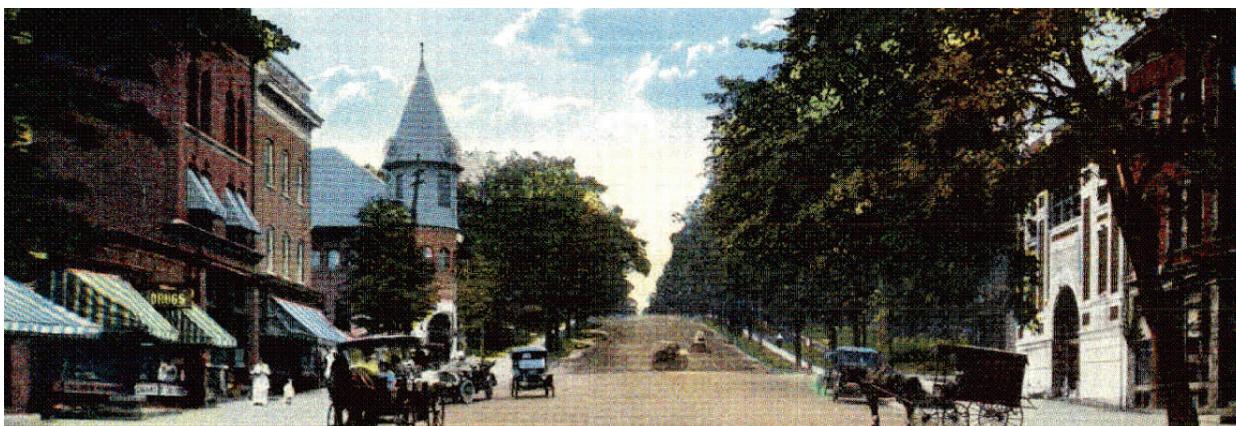


Figure VIII - 1: Palisade Avenue Facing East in the vicinity of Grand Avenue/Engle Street

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that the value of renovated historic properties increased at a significantly higher rate than that of new construction (since 1970 in selected cities—see Kim Chen, "The Importance of Historic Preservation in Downtown Richmond," *Historic Richmond Foundation News*, Winter 1990). The Planning Board reviewed a 1998 study, *Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation*, by the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University. This study explored the economic impacts of historic preservation in New Jersey and concluded that there are concrete economic benefits to a community that supports the preservation of its building and housing stock.

Included in the benefits is the "value-enhancing effect of historic designation" for properties protected under the umbrella of historic preservation. In *Keeping Time. The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (New York, rev. ed., 1997, 111), William Murtagh found that "no American neighborhood zoned as a historic district has ever decreased in value." On the contrary, designation "tends to escalate economic values."

Englewood derives many benefits from her historic heritage: a distinctive identity and sense of place, a connection to the past, civic loyalty and participation, beauty and aesthetic pleasure, and

strong property values. In order to promote these qualities and to safeguard the distinctive character of Englewood, the Master Plan attaches a high priority to the preservation and protection of the city's historic heritage.

Historic preservation is by no means a new practice. Federal legislation pro-

moted preservation beginning with the Antiquities Act in 1906. Congress established the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949 and passed the landmark National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The tax laws of 1976, 1981 and 1986 created incentives for historic preservation. The Supreme Court and state courts have ruled that preservation laws, like



Figure VIII - 2: The Bank Building located at Dean Street and Park Place

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zoning, height restrictions, and other laws regulating private property, are constitutional.

The first historic district was established in 1931 in Charleston, South Carolina. Inspired by this example, ordinances were passed to protect historic districts in Alexandria, Virginia (1946), Beacon Hill, Boston (1955) and Santa Fe (1957). Since those early decades of preservation, thousands of cities and towns in the United States have established historic preservation commissions, including Tenafly, Closter, Teaneck and Ridgewood in our immediate vicinity. The experience in those communities has been varied but in each of those communities the preservation of buildings with historic value has remained a community-wide aspiration.

Englewood has long recognized the importance of historic preservation. Previous Master Plans endorsed preservation, and the City's approach to housing rehabilitation and to economic development in the commercial center has been informed by an appreciation of the city's historic character. In 1994 the City established the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee to advance the cause.

Drawing upon the 1981 Bergen County Historic Sites Survey, the Historic Preserva-

tion Advisory Committee (HPAC) identified approximately 800 properties as having particular architectural or historical importance. Inclusion on this list is strictly honorary and offers no protection.

HPAC has raised public awareness of Englewood's inventory of historic buildings, streetscapes and districts, advised the Planning Board about applications

involving historic buildings, brought attention to endangered properties, and recorded the numerous homes lost through demolition in the City. In recent years, the City has passed ordinances intended in part to limit the demolition of homes. These measures placed limitations on tree removal and impervious coverage, and increased setbacks for pools, tennis courts, and other hard sur-



*Figure VIII - 3: The DeMott House on Grand Avenue
Currently part of an office/ warehouse complex*

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face play areas. While removing some incentives for demolition and protecting open space, the ordinances have, however, failed to preserve many of Englewood's historic homes. Demolition of historic homes has continued, although the economic climate has in fact slowed the number of demolitions.

Economics notwithstanding, homes of historic value have been and continue to be demolished. The 1988 Master Plan stated that:

"Englewood has an excellent inventory of buildings of architectural distinction and/or historic interest. The Master Plan encourages an awareness and appreciation of this heritage."

The 2003 Master Plan recommended the establishment of an Historic Preservation Commission. The 2003 Plan also recognized that a Commission could serve a valuable role in advising the Englewood Planning Board, the Board of Adjustment, the City Council and residents and businesses in the City and could establish voluntary guidelines for preservation in Englewood. In addition, the State of New Jersey continues to offer grants for preservation. Those grants are available only through local Historic Preservation Commissions. A Commission could en-

able Englewood to receive those State grants for preservation thus increasing the possibility of saving some of our most important structures.

The Master Plan recommends that:

- **An Historic Preservation Commission be established by the Mayor and City Council.**
- **The Commission should be a sub-committee of the Englewood Planning Board, reporting directly to the Planning Board in accordance with NJAC 40:55D-107.**
- **The Commission should use the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee survey as a basis for identifying properties with historic or architectural significance. The Commission shall develop rules and procedures for the periodic examination and modification of the survey.**
- **The Commission, through a community outreach, should enlist property owners both individually and in areas with historical significance in the City to enroll as designated properties and historic preservation districts.**

The 1975 Master Plan, as well as the reexaminations and updated Master Plans since 1975, recommended the preservation of five Dutch sandstone structures along Grand Avenue. One of those houses, the Thomas Demarest House (c. 1800), 370 Grand Avenue, has been de-

molished and replaced by a medical office (in addition to the four existing commercial structures, there are two residential Dutch sandstone structures in Englewood). **It is the recommendation of this plan that the four surviving structures, described below, be incorporated in an historic preservation overlay district to support their continued use and preservation.**

1. John G. Benson House (c. 1800), 60 Grand Avenue. This building, formerly owned by the Red Cross, has recently been purchased by new owners. This structure has undergone extensive interior renovations and a new building has been constructed on the property. The exterior of the original building has been preserved.
2. Garrett Lydecker House (c.1803), 228 Grand Avenue. The building was purchased by the Southeast Center for Independent Living and is used as a senior citizens center. An addition has been constructed on the property and extensive interior renovations have been completed in the original building. The exterior of the original property has been preserved.
3. Peter Westervelt House (c. 1808), 285 Grand Avenue. In the 1980's,

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an office complex was constructed on the property and the historic building was incorporated into the office complex. The interior of the building has been completely reconstructed and the exterior of the building has been preserved.

4. DeMott House (c. 1740), 488 Grand Avenue. A small wing of this building is the oldest structure in Englewood with other sections constructed between 1770 and 1800. Through adoptive reuse as an office, the building is currently functioning. A new warehouse has been constructed on the property. The DeMott House, although currently not threatened, occupies a site that may be far more valuable were the buildings demolished.

Some Englewood residents fear that preservation measures would limit their ability to make home improvements or impose cumbersome regulations. The Planning Board shares these concerns and therefore favors a voluntary approach to designation (other than the four Dutch sandstone structures referred to above) for an initial period of time. It is hoped that the effective and judicious

*Figure VIII - 4:
Examples of
Englewood's
Historic Heritage*



Figure VIII - 5:
*The Garrett-Lydecker House (c. 1803)
(owned and operated by the Southeast Center)*



work of the Historic Preservation Commission will establish a broad consensus for preservation. In this spirit, the Master Plan further recommends that:

- a) For a period of three years, all properties designated as historically and architecturally significant be included in the regulatory process only on a

voluntary basis on the part of the property owner.

b) The Historic Preservation Commission, together with the Mayor and Council, should develop incentives for those property owners applying for historic preservation designation such as:

(1) providing Architectural and Engineering support services to advise any homeowner of a designated property.

(2) providing infrastructure and streetscape improvements on a priority basis, particularly to groups of homeowners that have formed historic preservation districts. Improvements are to include sidewalk restoration (typically the homeowner's responsibility), lighting improvements, and curb and street improvements.

(3) providing technical testimony in support of applications before the Planning Board and Board of Adjustment.

(4) seeking grants and the corre-

*Figure VIII - 6:
The John G. Benson House (c. 1800)
(formerly owned by the Red Cross,
now a private office building)*



sponding benefits (historic preservation grants, neighborhood preservation grants, etc.) for designated properties and districts.

- (5) providing other incentives that are within the legal parameters established by the legislation.

In creating a Commission within the bounds of current State legislation, the Mayor and Council should develop a procedure whereby all demolition permits would be referred to the Commission for review and approval. The Commission would establish procedures for intervention. Intervention would include both incentives as described above in the evaluation of the property and disincentives such as providing testimony before the Board of Adjustment and/or Planning Board should an historically significant building be demolished and a replacement building require variances and appearances before one of the City's Boards.

The Planning Board strongly recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission should:

1. not stifle architectural creativity and innovation;

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2. not limit or discourage home improvements or remodeling; and
3. not restrict or be involved in the selection or approval of exterior colors other than to advise property owners of available historical colors for different time periods.

Many communities have implemented ordinances based on floor-area ratio (FAR) limits to prevent overbuilding on existing sites. These limits can be used to discourage the demolition of older homes and the replacement with new and larger structures. It is recommended that upon the creation of an Historic Preservation Commission, that the Commission together with the Englewood Planning Board undertake a study to determine whether the implementation of floor area ratio limits would have a positive impact on historic preservation. Experiences of other communities should be reviewed and assessed to determine if FAR limits can be utilized by Englewood to preserve its existing housing stock.