

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1. PLAN PURPOSE

A historic preservation plan is a city planning document intended to analyze the present state of the city's historic preservation program and provide a road map for the programming as it moves forward. Historic preservation is about ensuring the heritage and historic places that enrich our lives remain for future generations. Preserving historic places (buildings, structures, objects, sites) highlights what's already valued in Walla Walla by both residents and visitors. A historic preservation plan is the result of a collaborative process to understand the current program, identify what works well and what can be improved, and form a vision, goals, and an action plan for historic preservation in a community. A historic preservation plan is a city planning document that will guide the city's historic preservation program and provide a roadmap to achieving its goals.

The city of Walla Walla is a vibrant community with a rich history—some of the oldest built environment resources in the state are present in the city. It is also an important place to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). As a result, Walla Walla's cultural resources can illustrate the breadth and depth of city and region's history—from the early stewardship of the land by the ancestors of the CTUIR to the viticulture that has helped revitalize the community. When it established a historic preservation ordinance in 2002 and became a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 2003, the City of Walla Walla acknowledged this heritage and began to take steps to preserve it for future generations. This has occurred both within the City's preservation program (e.g., the design review process managing change to locally designated properties, the recent National Register of Historic Places designation of the Downtown Walla Walla Historic District) and outside its guidance (e.g., Walla Walla 2020's activities to encourage historic preservation and the flourishing of the Washington Main Street Program through the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation). The structure for historic preservation that is already in place can support additional policies to strengthen the historic preservation ordinance and Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and propel the program forward.

There are numerous benefits of historic preservation, from enhanced quality of life and fostering awareness of a community's heritage to economic advantages and environmental considerations. There are four key areas where historic preservation can benefit a community: social, cultural, environmental, and economic.

**Social.** Cultural resources are often touchstones for communities. These resources are recognized and known entities within their community, whether that is land associated with traditional cultural practices, a park that generations have visited with family and friends, or a commercial building that has housed a highly regarded legacy small business. Cultural resources provide an opportunity to learn about our shared past, how we as individuals relate to it and how we can move forward. Retaining cultural resources allows communities to engage with their past, acknowledging the good, the bad, and the complicated stories in an authentic and meaningful way. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund is one example of an organization deciding that, "Historic sites that illuminate these truths create authentic spaces for our society to make amends and begin healing," according to executive director Brent Leggs.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lawana Holland-Moore, "Processing a Painful Past Through Historic Places," *The National Trust for Historic Preservation*, May 24, 2021, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/processing-a-painful-past-through-historic-places#.Ysym-sOzMlrk>.



View of downtown after 1931 flood. Courtesy Washington State Archives.

**Cultural.** Many cultural resources are valuable for their architectural design, connection with important events in history, or association with indigenous tribes and significant people(s). Other cultural resources have ongoing meaning for their expression of a community's culture, whether it's art, history, or religion. Preserving resources of cultural significance demonstrates the value that differing cultures provide to an entire community.

**Environmental.** As our communities and the world grapple with the effects of climate change and seek environmental sustainability, historic preservation can support these efforts. Reusing historic buildings and structures preserves the embodied energy inherent to these resources and reduces what is taken to the landfill. Rehabilitating a historic building is more labor-intensive than materials-intensive, places value on the craftsmanship of the past and provides opportunities for compatible energy efficiency upgrades that support long-term retention of the resource. Reducing energy usage provides an opportunity for upgrading ducted forced air to heat pump systems that can often be installed with fewer visual and physical impacts to historic buildings. Window repairs provide an opportunity to retain historic materials while also improving energy loss and reducing solar gain through interior/exterior storm windows, films, and interior window treatments achieving performance levels comparable with new windows, rather than replacement with new windows having a short lifespan, cannot be repaired when they fail, and will generate a larger waste stream impact than repairing existing windows. The integration of solar panels affords greater individual building energy self-sufficiency reducing demand on the broader power grid, can reduce power costs supporting long-term financial viability, and can be integrated in a compatible manner on historic buildings and sites.

**Economic.** There are a number of economic benefits to historic preservation. The labor intensiveness of reusing historic buildings creates local jobs. Cultural resources provide a rich setting for businesses and events that draws residents and tourists, encouraging investment in local economies. Historic multiple-family buildings can provide examples of compatible approaches to long-term increased density. Historic properties tend to have stable property values allowing them to weather economic crises. PlaceEconomics, a private-sector firm that has studied the economic impacts of historic preservation, has numerous studies published and available on their website at [PlaceEconomics](#).

## 1.2. PLAN PROCESS & FINDINGS

This historic preservation plan is the result of collaboration between the City of Walla Walla, historic preservation consultants Northwest Vernacular (NWV), the Walla Walla Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), key stakeholders, and the Walla Walla community.

The City of Walla Walla hired NWV in December 2021 and held an initial introduction and kick-off session via Zoom with the City staff on January 4, 2022. NWV began their work by collecting relevant GIS data from the City of Walla Walla, Walla Walla County, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) to review development patterns, listed resources, and previous cultural resource inventory efforts. They then reviewed the city's historic preservation program, relevant ordinances, and associated planning documents (e.g., the most recent update to the Comprehensive Plan). They also briefly summarized the city's history from previously published sources—organizing it within development periods—and identified architectural trends in the city.

The HPC and NWV conducted the initial community outreach meeting on February 1, 2022. This public meeting was conducted as a hybrid Zoom and in-person gathering due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NWV worked with City planning and support services staff to develop community survey questions to understand the perception of historic preservation in Walla Walla. City support services staff created the questionnaire with the online tool SurveyMonkey. The survey remained open from January 31, 2022, to February 25, 2022, and received 495 responses. The full list of questions included in the survey and an analysis of the responses are included in Appendices A and B, respectively. Ultimately, respondents indicated that historic preservation greatly benefits community character and heritage tourism. Sustainability and economic development were also considered benefits of historic preservation but were not rated as highly as community character and heritage tourism. A notable metric from the survey was that only 17% of respondents believed the City of Walla Walla is doing enough to support and encourage historic preservation. Common responses included a desire for more public education and outreach and increased incentives and assistance for historic properties to keep them in active use and well maintained. There were mixed responses on how to tackle more inclusive history, with some respondents concerned about a need to expand the narrative around Walla Walla's history (i.e., more inclusivity of Tribal history and underrepresented communities) while others expressed concern about removing statues and rewriting history. These thoughts were considered in preparing the recommendations as well as the goals, policies, and proposals.

NWV, in consultation with City of Walla Walla staff and the HPC, developed a list of key stakeholders and conducted individual and group Zoom interviews in March and April of 2022 with those stakeholders. Stakeholders included area historians, historic property owners, and cultural resource workers. The full list is included in Credits and Acknowledgments.

NWV submitted an initial draft for HPC review in March 2022. After conducting the stakeholder interviews and reviewing the community survey results, NWV incorporated the edits received from the HPC and drafted goals, policies, and proposals for the historic preservation plan. NWV submitted the second draft to the City and HPC for review, who forwarded it on to DAHP for review. Upon receipt of edits from DAHP and additional edits from the City and HPC, a third illustrated draft was submitted to the HPC for review and public distribution. A public meeting was held on August 25, 2022, to discuss the plan and answer questions. Final edits were received from the City, HPC, and the public and incorporated into the final illustrated document which was submitted to the City in September 2022.

### 1.3. SUMMARY OF GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After reviewing the city's program and related ordinances, the Historic Preservation Element in the Comprehensive Plan, and communicating with a group of stakeholders, NWV identified a vision statement, mission statement, and five goals to guide ongoing work by the City's historic preservation program. NWV also drafted a series of recommendations that help the City implement supporting policies and pursue the goals.

**Vision statement:** Walla Walla will work with stakeholders to seek ways to celebrate and preserve its unique character while adapting to change.

**Mission statement:** Walla Walla's historic preservation program will protect and honor the city's diverse cultural resources through broad and deep public outreach and consistent application of the historic preservation ordinance.

The five goals to guide the program are:

**Goal 1:** Identify, evaluate, and nominate cultural resources.

**Goal 2:** Protect cultural resources.

**Goal 3:** Inform Walla Walla residents and property owners and provide access to information on historic preservation in the city.

**Goal 4:** Promote historic preservation as an essential aspect to economic vitality.

**Goal 5:** Ensure authenticity guides heritage tourism in Walla Walla.

The recommendations are divided into four overarching categories: programmatic updates, survey and inventory, city planning integration, and economic promotion. These categories not only organize the recommendations but reflect key elements that can drive Walla Walla's historic preservation forward. Programmatic updates are process-related and include updates to the historic preservation ordinance, the organization of the historic preservation commission and its bylaws, and the local register. The recommendations for future survey and inventory work will help maintain the city's awareness of historic resources throughout the city limits. City planning integration recommendations aim to add and/or improve City policies in their approach to cultural resources, whether that's zoning or consultation with Tribes and other agencies. And finally, the economic promotion recommendations are intended to strengthen the connection between economic well-being and historic preservation.