

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

"Like many small Oregon towns, Forest Grove sits at the crossroads of a rich pioneer heritage and a bright urban future."

Forest Grove at a Crossroads: Historic Preservation, Urban Growth, or Both?

by Holly Tsur, Vice-chair, Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board

Like many small Oregon towns, Forest Grove sits at the crossroads of a rich pioneer heritage and a bright urban future. Will we choose one direction over the other? Or better yet, can we travel both ways?



Deeks House, a 1911 Craftsman Bungalow at 1603 Ash Street, in need of a paint job

In today's busy digital age, people flip from one app to the next and zip from one appointment to the other. But in Forest Grove, if you take a slow stroll through any of our three national historic districts, you can literally touch the history that surrounds you.

Sit back and sip lemonade on the magnificent wraparound porch of the 1905 Queen Anne

Victorian known to locals as the "Green Gables House" in the Clark District. In the Walker-Naylor District, imagine parking your buggy in front of the Old Stagecoach Stop, an 1858 two-story built in grand Classical Revival style. Or study the intricate pattern of shingles that runs along the huge gable overhangs of a 1921 Craftsman Bungalow in Painter's Woods.

In an instant, you will see how Forest Grove's past blends harmoniously with its present. But, will these irreplaceable historic treasures remain a part of our town's future?



Painting Deeks House funded by Renovation Grant Program in 2010

According to the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, by 2050, Washington County's population will nearly double. And with such growth comes the need for additional housing. But, without clear and well-considered guidelines and standards for remodels and new infill

within our historic districts, we risk irrevocable damage to the historic integrity of existing structures and fragmenting our historic neighborhoods with insensitive infill.

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board has set out to protect and preserve our historic districts, while setting fair and equitable expectations for development. We contracted architectural consultants, Dortignacq Architecture, known for their successful design standards adopted by historic towns such as Oregon City. Together, we are proposing design standards and guidelines that provide comprehensive direction to builders, remodelers, and property owners.

The design standards consist of verifiable, objective requirements that protect our districts. Recognizing that some circumstances may warrant deviations, the design guidelines provide flexible guidance on how, with approval of Forest Grove’s Planning Department, construction may vary from the standards.

We need your feedback to ensure these documents fully address our community’s historic preservation needs. Based on your input, we will prepare revisions for consideration by Forest Grove’s Planning Commission and City Council. Once approved, the final edition will be incorporated into Forest Grove’s development codes and design guidelines handbook.



1874 Italianate/Gothic balcony restoration project funded by Renovation Grant Program in 2013

We invite you to review the standards and guidelines at: <http://www.forestgrove-or.gov/city-hall/citizen-boards-commissions/historic-landmarks-board.html>

By **October 15**, please submit your remarks to: jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov

Or submit by U.S. mail to:
James Reitz, Senior Planner
City of Forest Grove
P.O. Box 326
Forest Grove, OR 97116-0326

Or submit in person to James Reitz at:
1924 Council Street, Forest Grove, OR

Together, we can support well-nurtured historic districts that provide an attractive and lucrative market for historically representative restorations and harmonious infill development, boosting business for local contractors. Historic property owners will realize higher appreciation and resale values resulting from well-maintained and historically sensitive buildings. And with an even stronger historic identity, Forest Grove will emerge as a more attractive destination. A place where people come in larger numbers – not only to enjoy farm-fresh produce and world-class pinot – but to vacation, shop, and set down roots. With clear and well-considered historic guidelines and standards in place, we can help ensure preservation of Forest Grove’s rich historic heritage while providing room for a bright urban future.



Theater in the Grove exterior restoration funded by Renovation Grant Program in 2008

How Design Standards Benefit Astoria's Historic District

An Interview with Astoria's Historic Preservation Officer, Rosemary Johnson

While developing our own historic design standards and guidelines, Forest Grove's Historic Landmarks Board has learned not only from Oregon City but also from City of Astoria. In 1979, Astoria's Historic Buildings and Sites Commission adopted historic design review standards that have proven instrumental in ensuring responsible preservation of Astoria's three historic districts. In this August 22 interview with Rosemary Johnson, Planner and Historic Preservation Officer for City of Astoria, she shares Astoria's success story and lessons learned regarding adoption of their own historic design standards.

Q: How long have Astoria's historic design review standards been in effect?

A: We established the Historical Buildings and Sites Commission in 1977 with a code that identified their duties. In 1979, we adopted a Comprehensive Plan and Development Code that included Historic Preservation sections. Since then, there were several minor amendments; but in 1987, the code was amended to what was in effect until our most-recent amendment in 2013.

Q: What is the difference between Astoria's design guidelines and design standards, and how do you apply each?

A: In Astoria, design guidelines are *not a requirement*. They guide the City and applicant toward an intended goal for a general design. We look for compliance with the majority of the guidelines based on intent that results in a compatible and acceptable design. In contrast, design standards are *required* features. These are based on criteria or standards that apply to projects and must be specifically reviewed for compliance. Non-compliance with any one standard would need to be justified and/or a variance obtained. We adopted "guidelines" for design review in some non-historic neighborhoods for aesthetics, and "standards" for historic areas to protect the historic integrity of those resources.

Q: Has public opinion changed between now and when your standards were first introduced, and if so, how?

A: In the beginning, there was not much support for historic preservation and many saw it as a group of people telling individuals how they (the commission) wanted the "cute" Victorians to look. Now, there is large support for our design standards and many find that historic preservation is an asset for our community. Many also see the economic benefits of preservation.

Q: What are the three most important benefits that resulted from adoption of your historic design review standards?

A: Number One is the preservation of our historic properties. This has led to, Number Two, economic vitality and growth in the community, which in turn have created, Number Three, a sense of place and identity for Astoria as a mecca of historic properties.

Q: Have there been any drawbacks to adoption of your historic design review standards, and if so, what are they?

A: The original 1979 standards were too inclusive with review of fences and retaining walls. The drawbacks of the current code relate more to the administration of the program. We would like to adopt clearer standards for new construction adjacent to historic properties. The biggest complaint of most applicants is that it takes 45 days to 2 months for review and they want their permits *today*. We recently changed the exterior alteration review to allow a three-tier approach that will be very helpful by allowing more "over-the-counter" reviews, Historic Preservation Officer administrative reviews with public notice for minor alterations, and Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) review for everything else. This new process allows quicker review of many permits.



Astoria's Neoclassical Pilot Home Bldg. provides apartments for vacation rental

Q: Prior to adoption of Astoria's standards, what were the biggest concerns and misconceptions from historic property owners and how did you overcome them?

A: Many people saw them as too much government control over private property rights. Many property owners thought they could not make any changes and that we would tell them what color to paint their buildings. We did not and do not intend to control color. Education is vital. Explaining to individuals and groups that alterations are allowed if compatible is an on-going necessity. Education, education, education!



Ferdinand Fisher House, ca. 1883 Italianate
687 12th Street, Astoria Oregon

Q: Did adoption of Astoria's standards result in a lot of extra work for your Planning Commission with respect to approval and inspection of construction projects, and if so, how did you deal the extra workload?

A: We established a Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC) that was a "land use review" body equal to the Planning Commission. Historic review does not go to the Planning Commission. HLC members have different qualifications as recommended by the Certified Local Government program. This keeps the commission workloads separate and unique to their own expertise.

Q: Do your historic districts *look* significantly different today because Astoria adopted Historic Design Review Standards? If so, what physical changes to your historic districts do you attribute to the standards?

A: Improvements in the condition and maintenance of the buildings is a big change. We see entire neighborhoods working on improvements as a result of improvements completed by another neighbor. Additions and in-fill development need to be compatible with the historic buildings within the neighborhood, and therefore, you get visual continuity even with newer contemporary in-fill. Protection of these neighborhoods from incompatible development has saved many blocks from losing their integrity.

Q: Has tourism been affected by adoption of Astoria's Historic Design Review Standards, and if so, how?

A: Astoria advertises itself as a historic community. We are not "on the ocean" and we don't want to be an "anywhere USA" tourist town.

Each north coast community has something different to offer its tourists and Astoria offers the rich history, historic character of the neighborhoods, and the "working" community atmosphere. Astoria is a "destination" historic community. The historic preservation of our resources is critical to maintaining this character and the standards are our tool to achieve that goal.

Q: What advice can you offer Forest Grove's Historic Landmarks Board that will help us effectively promote public acceptance of our proposed Historic Design Standards/Guidelines?

A: Keep your process quick and inexpensive. Have items that staff can approve to reduce the HLB review time. The City should show its support for historic preservation by keeping permit fees very low. Have staff help applicants with their designs. We work with these codes and concepts daily. A home owner does not always understand what we are looking for in design. Therefore, education is critical. Let them know "why" something is right or wrong, leading them to discover for themselves that it is in their best interest for the beauty of the final product.

Q: What could Astoria have done better during the *public input process* regarding their Historic Design Review Standards?

A: The original code had limited public input. Work sessions with the public are important to educate them as to what the code does and does not allow. Recent amendments involved numerous work sessions and outreach to explain the code and what we were trying to accomplish. As a result, there was no opposition to the code when it went for adoption.

Q: What could Astoria have done better during the process of *adopting and implementing* their Historic Design Review Standards?

A: It couldn't have gone any better. Education of the City Council is as important as education of the public. Explaining the code to the Council at a work session and getting their support is important to a successful program. Once adopted, the Council is the body that hears the appeals and their understanding of the program makes for a uniformed effort by the entire City for historic preservation.



Before: 1924 Fort George Building was vacant with broken windows — a dangerous eyesore to Astoria

Q: What happens to property owners when they do not comply with Astoria's Historic Design Review Standards?

A: Enforcement is difficult! Once a violation is identified, the Historic Preservation Officer (me) contacts the property owner and advises them of the violation. We try to get cooperation in compliance; but if that does not work, we do have a Code Enforcement process for all City code violations that allows us to issue citations and fines for non-compliance. We start with a series of enforcement letters that can lead to citations. Compliance can mean restoration of the feature or removal of incompatible alterations. While we have never cited anyone for a historic violation, we have required several property owners to repair the features. While necessary for the integrity of the program, code enforcement can create a negative attitude toward the program. Code enforcement should be handled carefully and tactfully to remain positive for the program.

Q: Have Astoria's Historic Design Review Standards changed since their initial adoption by your Planning Commission and your City Council? If so, what were the major changes?

A: The major change was just this year. We established a three-tier review process to make it easier on the customer especially with a quicker review. We also adopted clear and objective criteria for those tiers and for historic designation of properties.



After: Historic restoration involved years of work and brought state-wide recognition of the new brewery

Q: What has been the most unexpected result from adoption of Astoria's Historic Design Review Standards?

A: Spin off programs and a boon to economic development have been more than we imagined. The Historic Landmarks Commission helped start a citizens group, *Lower Columbia Preservation Society*, which is now a leading organization in the area of preservation related support and education. Clatsop Community College has begun a two-year certificate historic preservation program that has been very successful. Columbia Pacific Preservation (CPP) was established as a center of excellence for historic preservation through education, services, and goods. There has also been an increase in craftsmen and services in the area that support historic preservation including a vintage hardware store, glass repair craftspeople, blacksmith, woodworkers, and more.



Community Enhancement Grant (CEP) Funds

The Historic Landmarks Board (HLB) now has CEP grant funding available for the 2014-15 year. If your house is on our local historic register, or is a contributing building in one of the three historic districts, your house may be eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding. The HLB may have funds to help with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work, have structural work to do such as foundation or porch repairs, even exterior painting or re-roofing, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant, up to \$1,000 for many projects, and up to \$500 for painting and roofing. We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to challenges you may have. For more information, contact James Reitz at **503-992-3233** or **jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov**.

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Preserving Forest Grove is a quarterly newsletter published by the Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board to help fulfill its duty of public education regarding the preservation of cultural resources. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please call James Reitz at **503-992-3233** or **jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov**.

Historic Landmarks Board

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In this Issue:

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