

Executive Summary

Inventory and Analysis of Historic Preservation Ordinances in Pennsylvania Municipalities

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This research provides the first comprehensive statewide inventory and analysis of historic preservation ordinances in Pennsylvania municipalities.

The research considered municipal historic preservation ordinances that are authorized by the Historic District Act (HDA) of 1961, and the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) of 1968.

To conduct the research, the team gathered data to determine the extent to which Pennsylvania municipalities had enacted local ordinances under the authority of the HDA and/or the MPC to regulate historic resources within their jurisdictions. The research methods used to undertake the inventory and analysis of historic preservation ordinances included: a survey of county planning directors, consultations with the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), a review of selected municipal ordinances, an audit-based analysis of a representative sample of municipal ordi-

nances, a classification of preservation activities, geo-spatial mapping, focus group discussions with county planning directors, the development of a sociodemographic database to construct a demographic profile of municipalities engaged in ordinance-based historic preservation planning, and case studies using municipality-level site visits and telephone interviews.

Following are the findings and policy considerations from the research.

Identification of municipalities with historic preservation ordinances

The research team identified 294 municipalities (not including Philadelphia and Pittsburgh) that have enacted one or more types of historic preservation regulations. These municipalities comprise about 12 percent of the state's 2,562 municipalities. Within the 294 municipalities,



promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

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105 (about 4 percent of the state total) have enacted HDA empowered ordinances and 195 (about 8 percent) used MPC authority to enact zoning ordinances that provide for historic preservation; a small number of municipalities employ both MPC and HDA ordinances. Additionally, 26 municipalities have provisions for historic resource preservation in their subdivision and land development ordinances (SALDO). The link to the online historic preservation maps is <http://arcg.is/19DW8L>.

In examining rural versus urban demographics, the researchers found that 215 municipalities with historic preservation provisions are urban and 79 are rural. Notably, only about 5 percent of rural municipalities have enacted historic preservation ordinances. Geographically, rural municipalities with these designations are overwhelming in the eastern (25) and central (43) regions, with only 11 in the western region.

In terms of municipality types, there are 128 second class townships, 124 boroughs, 21 cities, 20 first class townships, and one town with historic preservation ordinance provisions.

Documentation of current practices operating under the authority of the MPC

The research involved an in-depth review and audit of 60 ordinances from 60 municipalities. The audit found 13 ordinances with no evidence of language or provisions regarding historic preservation. Similarly, nine ordinances had limited evidence of language related to historic preservation.

However, the remaining 38 ordinances had historic preservation provisions. These were grouped into one of following three categories, based on the number of regulatory provisions in the ordinance: “Extensive Activity” (11 percent), “Moderate Activity” (55 percent), or “Limited Activity” (34 percent).

Those municipalities with more historic preservation regulations are predominately upper income and urban townships, and all are in the eastern region of the state.

Conversely, municipalities that are in the western and central regions, or those that are lower and middle-income boroughs, typically were characterized by historic preservation ordinances with less stringent regulation of historic resources. The most common regulatory provisions in the 38 ordinances containing historic preservation language are:

1. restrictions/delays on demolition of historic structures (76 percent of ordinances);
2. review of alterations (71 percent);
3. the use of historic overlay districts (63 percent); and
4. design guidelines (53 percent).

Other regulatory approaches, including restrictions on demolition by neglect and the designation of village districts, were used by a smaller share of municipalities.

A wider inventory/dataset of preservation activities by municipality as identified by surveyed county planning directors revealed a tremendous range of regulatory historic preservation activities. There are a variety of historic resource designations (for example, historic districts, historic overlay districts, tiers of resources, etc.), a range of regulated or incentivized activities (for example, review of alterations, restrictions on demolition, exemptions and waivers), and several types of advisory or administrative bodies (historic architectural review boards, historic commissions, etc.).

Correlation of sociodemographic factors with municipalities that have historic-preservation-related ordinances

Municipalities that engage in historic preservation typically have higher per capita incomes, greater median home values, higher rates of population growth, and greater population densities. These municipalities also tend to have populations with higher educational attainment levels and lower median ages.

Geo-spatial mapping confirmed the socio-demographic analysis and provided additional insights into the geographic context of municipalities engaged in ordinance-based historic preservation activities.

Policy Considerations

From the research findings, the team developed the following policy considerations. The first 10 considerations relate to the extent and geographic pattern of historic preservation. The last five focus on methods of preservation.

1. Revise the MPC to require county comprehensive plans to be more detailed in specifying the historic resources counties wish to preserve, and specific actions being undertaken at the county or municipal level to protect those resources. A list of municipalities with historic preservation ordinances should be a required element in all county comprehensive plans.
2. Expand the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Community Preservation Coordinators Program.
3. Increase SHPO support for rural county planning offices.
4. Extend better state oversight and reporting of MPC-related historic preservation activity.
5. Provide outreach to municipalities with favorable socio-demographic characteristics and communities with potential for economic development.
6. Sustain funding for the Keystone Historic Preservation Grants Program.
7. Expand the use of county-level zoning with historic preservation provisions.
8. Continue funding for the Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Tax Credit program.
9. Provide historic preservation grants for low-income homeowners.
10. Expand the roles of the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and SHPO in promoting historic preservation as an economic development tool, and update the mission of the HDA and MPC to reflect the economic development value of historic preservation.
11. Retain and update the HDA and develop a model ordinance to ease adoption.
12. Revise the MPC to provide clearer language on the requirements for historic preservation and guidelines for employing common historic preservation approaches.
13. Develop MPC language encouraging multi-municipal zoning and historic commissions.
14. Develop model ordinances of MPC historic preservation provisions.
15. Require SHPO to review MPC-enabled historic preservation ordinances.

For a copy of the report, *Inventory and Analysis of Historic Preservation Ordinances in Pennsylvania Municipalities*, visit the Center's website at www.rural.palegislature.us.

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